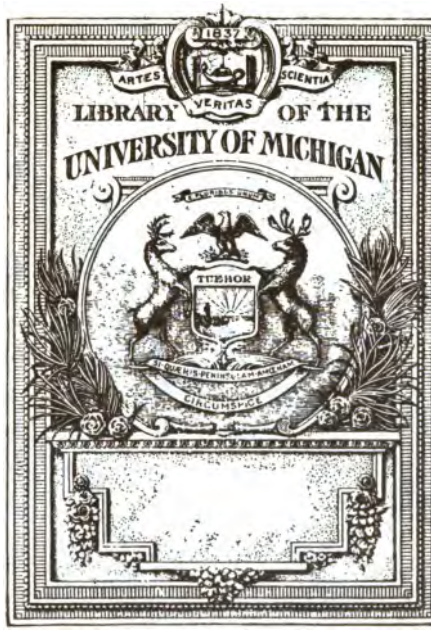

THE LADYE CHACE:

A BALLAD.

BY THE

AUTHOR OF "CHRISTIAN BALLADS."

EDITED BY

FRANCIS PHILIP NASH.

"For there be those so apt, credulous and facile to love, that if they hear of a proper man, or woman, they are in love before they see them, and that merely by relation."

Burton.

[CABINET EDITION.]

PHILADELPHIA:
LIPPINCOTT & CO.
1877.

Eby. A. Rathbrue
5-9-1923

ADVERTISEMENT.

For reasons which are sufficiently explained in the editor's preface, the author of this Ballad now gives it to the press once more. After nearly forty years since it was withdrawn from print, it appeared last summer in serial form in the columns of a widely circulated periodical. The juvenile draught was imperfectly published, and it now appears in great part rewritten; incidents have been changed, and the plot itself considerably varied. Omitted portions, after corrections, are also restored. As the amusement of summer-vacations and occasional moments of relaxation, these improvements have been made; but its re-issue would have imposed a task upon the author for which his grave pursuits would have left him no time, had not the proffered aid of a beloved literary friend supplied him with an accomplished editor, whose critical suggestions have enabled him, without effort, to give the little work as much completeness as the nature of the case permits.

A small edition only is printed, and will be circulated, chiefly, among personal friends.

A. C. C.

LEACOTE.
1877.

EDITOR'S PREFACE.

In giving a preface to the following poem, I only desire to assume the responsibility for its appearance in its present form. I advised its republication in view of the facts. The poem was published when the author was a mere youth, and cannot be recalled; I, therefore, thought that it ought to be reissued after a thorough revision, such as his riper judgment might bestow, and in such shape that, if necessary, it might some day, without impropriety, take its place among the author's collected works.

The poem, moreover, seemed to me to possess what perhaps I may call an historical value. Half a century ago it was the fashion to forget as far as possible the legitimate descent of American civilization and institutions, and whatever else goes to the making of national character, from their true source in the mother country. It seemed to be thought by many that historical continuity could be broken as easily and as completely as political unity. In contradistinction to the prevailing fashion, this little poem aimed, for the first time, apparently, in our country, to carry the reader back to fields

of old English history now made familiar to us by the poetry of the English laureate and others, but then little remembered, even in England. I venture to believe that the future historian of American literature will find a place for some record of this early attempt to vindicate the title of American Poetry to a rightful share in the common heritage of the English-speaking race. But, be this as it may, when we consider the moral design apparent throughout, of correcting the ill-feelings engendered by two wars and reviving those natural ties which had been rudely sundered by political divisions; and in view of the fact that this was attempted while the recent wounds of 1812–15 still rankled bitterly, one cannot refuse approval to the Christian spirit of a youthful writer who was not afraid to stand almost alone speaking out of his human heart words of peace and good will amid the clamours of the multitude.

These are neither all nor the best, but only the less obvious reasons of my advice. Others there are, which I could give, if I were a reviewer and not an editor—reasons based on my critical estimate of certain parts of the poem and of the whole, considered as the work of an American youth of forty years ago; as the product of a period when our present relations with England, as steam and the telegraph have developed them, neither existed nor could have been foreseen. But my

Rt. Reverend friend denies his editor any such privilege, and restricts my references to himself to the coldest terms of official respect.

The important part which Bishop Percy's "Reliques" have played in forming the literature of the last hundred years is now generally recognized. It was an enthusiasm inspired by that collection of old English Ballads that led the author of the "Ladye Chace" to attempt a song of Alfred, only to relinquish it for this more dramatic story of Edgar. Thus, even beyond the Atlantic, Bishop Percy's faithful and loving industry was to bear a harvest which he never looked for—a harvest among the first-fruits of which may be reckoned this little poem; while, as fruit of a later growth, the author's "Christian Ballads" may be looked upon as only a better and higher expression of the same reverent sympathy with all that belongs to old England, as the venerable mother of us all.

FRANCIS PHILIP NASH.

GENEVA, September, 1877.

TO META,

ONLY DAUGHTER OF THE LATE

CHARLES KEITH HYDE, ESQ.

1.

Because I love thee, and because thou art
  Thy father's child ; and for that memory
Of his true worth endears thee to my heart ;
  And for thy mother, whose bright heraldry
  Is her least glory ; therefore, these, to thee
I dedicate, dear Meta. Thou may'st read
  My boyish ballad with a maiden's glee,
For they were young who first bestowed its meed;
Now, golden harps are theirs, and mine the mourner's weed.

2.

To grow like trees of reverend root sublime
  I fain would teach my country. Ours the spoil
Of a great past, that to our western clime
  Pours forth the wealth of olden tide and toil :
  And who would spring, the fungus of the soil,
Unglorified with ancient wit and worth ?
  But thy sweet youth, as 'twere the lily's foile,
Hath bloom'd and blossom'd. Lovely from thy birth,
As thy first years have been, be all thy days on earth.

3.

And learn betimes of by-gone days the lore,
  Not to misuse nor misconceive thine own;
For here, where all is new, and tales of yore
  Enrich no scene, invest no mountain lone,
  Nor lend the voice of brook and breeze their tone,
'Tis but to breathe a hermit, or a brute,
  To know no life beyond our clime or zone;
Of hoary eld to deem the voices mute;
To leave of all we love unsought the parent root.

4.

But I have toiled historic truth to know,
  Have made it mine; and if fresh fields are ours,
Here let my hand some fruitful seeds down throw,
  Of Faith and Right. Seek thou no fairer bowers
  Than Fairfax found, who left his ivied towers
For Shenandoah, in Virginia's wild.
  If idly there, amid its wreaths and flowers,
Thou shalt read o'er my lay, delightful child,
Recall its moral oft, to fancy undefiled.

1873.

PROEME.

I.

1. O who has not heard of the Northmen of yore,
   How flew, like the seabird, their sails from the shore,
   How, westward, they stayed not, till, breasting the brine,
   They hailed Narraganset, the land of the vine.

2. Then the war-songs of Rollo, his pennon and glaive,
   Were heard as they danced by the moonlighted wave,
   And their golden-haired wives bore them sons of the soil,
   While raged with the redskins their feud and turmoil.

3. And who has not seen, 'mid the summer's gay crowd,
   That old pillar'd tower of their fortalice proud,
   How it stands solid proof of the sea chieftains' reign,
   Ere came with Columbus those galleys of Spain.

4. 'Twas a claim for their kindred: an earnest of sway,
By the stout-hearted Cabot, made good, in its day;
Of the Cross of St. George, on the Chesapeake's tide,
Where lovely Virginia arose like a bride.

5. Came the pilgrims with Winthrop; and, saint of the West,
Came Robert of Jamestown, the brave and the blest;
Came Smith, the bold rover, and Rolfe--with his ring,
To wed sweet Matoäka, child of a king.

6. Undaunted they came, every peril to dare,
Of tribes fiercer far than the wolf in his lair;
Of the wild irksome woods, where in ambush they lay;
Of their terror by night and their arrow by day.

7. And so where our capes cleave the ice of the poles,
Where groves of the orange scent sea-coast and shoals,
Where the froward Atlantic uplifts its last crest,
Where the sun, when he sets, seeks the East from the West:

8. The clime that from ocean to ocean expands,
The fields to the snow-drifts that stretch from the sands,
The wilds they have conquered, of mountain and plain,
Those pilgrims have made them fair Freedom's domain.

9. And the bread of dependence if proudly they spurned,
'Twas the soul of their fathers that kindled and burned,
'Twas the blood of the Saxon within them that ran;
They held—to be free is the birthright of man.

10. So oft the old lion, majestic of mane,
Sees cubs of his cave breaking loose from his reign;
Unmeet to be his if they braved not his eye,
He gave them the spirit his own to defy.

II.

1. Then Albion be true to thyself in thy sons,
And honour thy blood in thine offspring that runs;
It ripens with aging like generous wine,
And warms to its kindred with impulse divine.

2. And the birthright we scorned when a dole it was flung,
Our kindred with England, her faith and her tongue,
We claim it unchalleng'd, or grudge it who may,
A continent holds it: what churl can gainsay?

3. Avaunt the mere islander cribb'd by his shores,
Whose soul, like his eyesight, no distance explores!
With instinct imperial disdaining its girth,
The true heart of England embraces the earth.

4. The family Bible, 'tis one and the same;
We read in their churchyards the family name;
Of grim elder brothers cadets we may roam,
But theirs is the homestead that once was our home.

5. No foreigners we when we visit thy strand,
For the bones of our forefathers rest in the land;
Our Faith at thine altars unsullied we find,
Our laws in thy charters, thy manners, thy mind.

6. By the James and the Hudson, the Gulf and the Lakes,
Thy voice from the Past living echoes awakes;
To the spell of thy song and the might of thy thought,
We yield a fresh empire, with homage unbought.

7. And gen'rous the feeling that claims them as ours,
Those schools of thine Alfred, those temples and towers.
Like Hellas, new races thy name shall combine;
Where English is spoken, its glory is thine.

8. Our mothers still teach us thy story of old
Where the cradle is rock'd and the lullaby trolled;
And the harp of our West, 'tis the same that was strung
Where thy gray-bearded minstrel the roundelay sung.

9. Its far distant warblings—he heard them who stood
Where Snowdon uplifted its crown o'er the flood;
Those visions of glory he feared to explore,
Behold them unfolded; they brighten our shore.

10. Then hail, Mother Albion! and long may they twine
Thy banner with ours and our banner with thine,
Till broad o'er new nations, those ensigns unfurled
Give laws to earth's races, and peace to the world.

11. And scorn not my numbers, albeit with awe
My fingers unskill'd o'er the chords I must draw,
While, a lay of thine Eld, in this far Western clime,
I sing an old ballad, of England's old time.

THE LADYE CHASE.

FYTTE I.

MAID MARIAN.

I.

Come list a lay of old romance,
The witch-work of a ladye's glance;
Of such an eye as doth express
Far more than Hera's loveliness;
The azure which, from o'er the water,
The Saxon gave to Albion's daughter,
What time the victor, in his pride,
Was vanquished by his English bride,
Nor crossed again the surges' swell,
But chose with his young wife to dwell,
Where, sea-girt, on her island steep,
Britannia's trident awes the deep.
From these, Atlantis' daughters sprung;
From these, the music of our tongue
Spreads o'er new worlds, and wins the wild
To Wisdom's precepts undefiled.

II.

O'er Devon's valleys mounts the morn :
And, as through clouds the day is breaking,
Oh, hear them wind the merry horn ;
The startled woods around are waking !
Gaily they echo to thy call,
Old Nimrod of a royal hall :
Blow long and loud : though, far and near,
Start at the sound the mountain deer :
For gathering fast from moor and glen,
Throng to the sport the merry-men ;
And forth from court and cotter's door,
Briskly the early sportsmen pour,
While, fragrant as from new mown hay,
The morning air comes sweet as May.

III.

The castle court is all alive,
As when the bee-queen leaves her hive ;
And forth they come ; the dawning light
Gleams on the crests of thane and knight,
And flashes from the shiny bow,
Like beams on rigs of driven snow.

They come;—in sooth, no mean array,
The noblest of the land are they,
And pleasant is the show.
Around, their coursers neigh for sport,
And champ the bit with pride of port,
Oft wheeling to and fro.
Anear, bedizened pages wait;
And thralls impatient throng,
Content with cruel thraldom's fate
To scud like hounds along,
And claim in every dog a mate,
That spurns the tethering thong.
Full long the eager pack expect
The keeper's whistle shrill,
With knowing look and ears erect,
To catch their master's will.
The vassal loathes the dull delay,
And chides the fast-advancing day;
While yet the fretful horses wheel,
Impatient of the curb they feel.
Oh, merry may their hunting be,
As lively is their route to see;
And worthy be their game!

St. Hubert speed their sport aright,
And many a buck shall rue, ere night,
That here to hunt they came.

IV.

But hark ! once more the horn is wound,
And forth the ready coursers bound,
While springing to the sylvan fray
Dogs, serfs and pages are away.
Away, as blithe, as light as air;
There's not a lagging dullard there,
Though more sedate, in native pride,
The lords than their retainers ride;
Amused so soon their serfs to see,
Far, far afield careering free,
And smiling as the full halloo
Comes faintly from the boisterous crew.
Forward they fly o'er plain and hill,
O'er mound and valley forward still.
As with the breeze they fleet along
The early peasant hears their cry,
And pauses, pleased to hail the throng,
And cheer their coursers sweeping by.

V.

Slow moves that group of lordly blood :
While now, perchance, by gay greenwood,
The carles their dull approach abide,
Each wishing some one else might dare
To break the harmless victim's lair,
With hark-away ; but reckless all,
Alike of hasty hound and thrall,
They choose their time. And of the crowd,
Amid the proudest seeming proud,
What twain are those—whose steeds appear
More haughtily their heads to rear,
As conscious that they paw the ground
Beneath the chief of all around,
And bend the arching neck and mane
To hands well used rash men to rein.
Their mantles are inwove with gold ;
Their arms two tabard heralds hold,
Whereon, impressed in glitt'ring lines,
The cross of our redemption shines.
The one, unmarked by star or gem,
Whose brow bespeaks his diadem,
Hath alien kings around to wait,
And dukes of many a foreign state.

Who may he be?—I fain would reck
That hath brave Hoel at his beck?
For Arvon sends her royal line
In his superior light to shine;
And Kenneth, too, behind him rides,
And Cumberland's proud prince besides;
  And Alwyn of the north countree,
And Angus of the Isles is there;
  And many a lord from over sea,
And many a border monarch's heir.
If even their sports encumbered seem
With arms that one might useless deem,
The Marches bristling still with feud
May tell why spear and helm intrude.

VI.

And Alban of the Dale attends,
  Forgetting now his burning song,
Though oft his wilder art he lends
  To wind the bugle's larum strong;
For the young bard is hunter now,
  'Mid laughing churls and listless squires,
Though high-born pride is on his brow,
  And he is sprung of princely sires—

A poet race, and nobly born,
  That waked in royal halls their lyres,
And had not blushed to see, this morn,
Their heir so proud a chase adorn,
With quivered shafts behind him swung,
Where erst the holier harp was slung,
And winding oft the hunter's horn
  With ardent hopes and high desires,
Forgetful of the lays they sung,
  But warmed with all their minstrel fires.

VII.

Oh, who the pair, but England's king,
    And England's noblest peer?
'T is Edgar foremost of the ring,
    'T is Athwold riding near.
King Edward rules this noble rout;
    A jovial prince is he,
And well he loves, the woods about,
To raise the forest-rover's shout,
    Like those of low degree—
Who yet have sov'reigns of their own,
Who claim a palace and a throne
    By every greenwood tree,

And deem themselves as royal there—
In Nature's wilds and God's free air,
By right divine—as he.
And Athwold is his favorite lord,
His friend of bosom and of board ;
For all his deep concern he shares,
And, dearer than the crown he wears
Hath Edgar loved him; and hath made
His wish the sceptre that he swayed.
And Athwold, of his court, alone
Hath such high favour of the throne,
To meet his king with friendly speech,
And schemes of war or peace to teach.
Ev'n now, behold ! as on they fare,
He feels his ministerial care,
And deeply counsels—as I trow,
For earnestly he knits his brow,
Some plan of pleasure or of state,
With sage advice and deep debate.

VIII.

So forth and onward till they gain
The forest's side. The waiting train
Cheer their approach, and quick prepare,
From tangled copse, his quiet lair,

To rouse their antler'd foe, and launch
Upon his track the blood-hounds staunch.
Right noble game ! at rest, and laid
In the brown thicket's cooling shade,
He hears not yet the larum yell
That peals along the distant dell,
Nor dreams that, ere the dew-drops dry
On his green couch, his limbs shall lie
Full many a weary mile afar,
Mangled and rent with many a scar.
Oh, could the hunters see him now,
Those shapely sides, that stately brow,
His quiet rest the rill beside,
The wild-flowers scattered on his hide,
Would they no pity call to mind ?
No mercy show ?—would Athwold wind
So loud th' exciting horn ? I ween,
Knew Athwold what this chace doth mean,
Knew he his monarch's hidden thought,
And who the real quarry sought,
Knew he what forecast plann'd this day,
What game within its gaming lay,
He had not been so blithe. But hark,
The greedy pack's delighted bark

Hath scared from coverts deep their prey ;
The hunt is up !—away, away !

IX.

Away !—and aye away with pride !
The lordling by the menial's side
Now speeds amid the scampering throng,
And scours the beaten glade along.
The monarch leads the merry crew ;
    Full gaily on they fly :
And cheerily, Lord Athwold, too,
    Peals out the hunting cry.
He shouts as joyous as the rest,
As careless bears his feather'd crest,
As loudly chides each lagging hound,
As swiftly clears the echoing ground ;
  Till now they dash the wild-wood thro' :
  And as each hunter leaves the view,
  Mellows afar the shrill halloo.

X.

And long they chased, and far they rode,
Till now the sultry noon-tide glowed.
The stag has left the forest deep,
But still th' unwearied race they keep.

And woe for him !—his branching brow
And ev'n his hoof is heavy now.
What boots it that, as swift as wind,
He flies, when hounds, as fleet, behind,
Still follow on his weary track,
And howl their hunger at his back ?
What boots it that the tears are pouring
Down his dun cheeks from eyes imploring,
When they who cheer the chase, the while
Can look on human tears, and smile ?
What boots it that his harmless hide,
Rashed in the brake, with blood is dyed,
When, of that reckless rout, the half
Can look on human blood and laugh ?
Men are but wolves. The panting deer
The blood-hounds, panting too, can hear ;
Then swifter starts he ; but the pack,
Hot-toothed, is springing at his back.
With bound and yell they close around ;
  The foremost dog has torn his flank,
And now, another, with a bound,
Bears his bold frontlet to the ground,
  Where, on a green and flowery bank,
To fiercer man and ravening hound

He yields at last. A shining dart—
'Tis Alban's—pierces to his heart :
Forth foams the gore ; the rocky dell
Echoes with hounds' and hunters' yell ;
And gathering fast, with failing breath,
The merry archers hail the death.

XI.

Scramble the gaping churls around
To marvel o'er the skillful wound.
They praise the king's unrivall'd craft ;
The head was grazed by Edgar's shaft,
And Alban's, if more deftly aimed,
Might yet for impudence be blamed.
And all within that greenwood glen,
How goodly are the gathered men
For poet's eye to see :
A peaceful war, at worst, is done,
Which gentlest maid may look upon
With scarce a weeping e'e.
And though the bard of warlike lay
Might scorn the hunting of this day,
'Tis fitter far for me,

Than ghastly tales of olden time
That live in ancient minstrels' rhyme,
Though smoothly glossed they be.
And who shall look at yonder throng,
Where now the bold young heart, and strong,
Beats warm from such a race,
Nor own 'tis fairer than the field
Where stain'd was each brave hunter's shield,
And blanched each ruddy face;
Where shuddering mothers looked, with fear,
For sons they bore, and found them near,
Their's, though in Death's embrace:
Where the young wife, with boding breast,
Sought her boy's sire, and found—his crest;
Slow raised his mask, and shriek'd the rest,
In proud old Chevy-Chace?

XII.

Not such King Edgar's hunt to-day;
But list his stern command:
He speaks, and ready to obey,
The startled pages stand.

"Boy, let thy palfrey bear the deer
Speedy to Harewood Castle, near;
For sure the castle nigh must be,
And, Athwold, I would dine with thee;
Long have I hoped thy halls to see."

XIII.

There are who in their coffins wake,
And strive the swathing fold to break,
And, gasping, draw the stifled air,
And ope their eyes, in darkness—where?
Those eyes, which, even now in dreams
  Or roving trance, were all delight,
Mid visions fair of angel-beams,
  And fields of heavenly beauty bright;
There are, when breaks the fairy spell,
  And fleeteth in their fearful waking,
Whose heaven seems changed, at once, for hell,
  And space, for bonds that know no breaking.
Then wildly o'er the buried soul
A thousand thoughts convulsive roll,
  Of those dear hands that lowly laid him,
And piled the thumping clods above;

Of that false swooning that betrayed him,
Mid unavailing tears of love;
All with the sense of struggles chained,
Of long delaying death restrained;
The consciousness that all is o'er;
That his own dreaming wove his shroud;
That he awakes to wake no more,
Unheard though he should call aloud.
So, with that challenge of the king,
Broke Athwold's long, sweet slumbering;
So did he wake to know 'twas over,
The sleep of a delightful vision;
The fairy dreamings of the lover,
His wand'rings in a world Elysian.
He woke, to feel at once his fall;
And, like the swimmer, in appal,
O'erspent, to close on life his eye,
To grasp the floating straw, and die.

XIV.

The courtier started at the word;
Vanished the colour from his cheek;
He spoke no welcome to his lord;
His lips were blanch'd—he could not speak.

He trembled—well he might—the while
He gazed on Edgar's look of guile.
"Yes, all is o'er!" he thought; then broke
His coward spell, and stammering spoke:
"My liege, though well my pride might court
Such ending of our morning's sport,
Much do I fear 'tis far to go,
While the hot noonday scorches so.
'Tis yet full many a weary mile
Before my dark old towers appear;
And when 'tis gained, the dreary pile
Hath little for my sov'reign's cheer.
'Twere shame my loyal halls should be
Unready such a guest to see,
Too poor, at best, my liege, for thee!
There is a forester lives near;
Lives, as they tell, on thy good deer;
A poaching fellow! in his den
Oft harbouring the merry-men;
And, well-a-day! his outlaw hold
Were worth thy sight! Strange tales are told
Of the gay revels sported there.
He hath a daughter passing fair,

With lip and eye to charm a king ;
A fairy, tripping, pixy thing,
That of her father's best shall bring ;
And gaily old green-wood shall ring.
Ho, ho ! young Alban of the Dale,
What is thy fright?—why look'st so pale
My liege, this minstrel, chance, may tell
More of this low-born damosel.
I know her but from tales ; from song
This rogue romancer might repeat.
Come, Alban, thou hast known her long;
Hast found young Marian's kisses sweet ? "

XV.

Burned Alban's beardless cheek, while loud
Rung the loose laughter of the crowd ;
And nigh his hilted hand had sped
His anger on Lord Athwold's head.
But, with a thought, resentment chose
More dire revenge. The laughter rose ;
And Alban, falteringly, replied :
"Nay, then, if thus my loves you chide,
'Tis so, the maid of Croswell Water
Was but an honest woodman's daughter ;

I found her on a hunting day,
When I was weary and astray.
She seemed some goddess of the wood ;
And, for a moment, mute I stood,
Then knelt and caught her trembling hand
And worshipped, till her sweet command
Bade me arise ; methought she ne'er
Had seen a youth of manly air :
  Yet fearless was her sweet consent :
  Abashed, and all so innocent,
  She loved, but knew not what it meant,
And I loved her. You know the rest ;
  'Twas ever so when hearts agree :
She had to mine an answ'ring breast,
  And that was all the mystery.
I was awhile her father's guest ;
And never youth a lovelier press'd
To his warm heart than Alban then,
Who deemed him happiest of men
While Marian loved him—but, alas !
So ever morning's glories pass :
The step the dawn's bright dews knew
      well
Hies now no more, along the dell,

To find, embower'd with eglantine,
Her heart's own dearest haunt, and mine.
With Spring's young buds she drooped
away,
And Marian only lives, to-day,
In her lorn lover's cheerless lay.

XVI.

The turf is sunken on her grave,
Though there the weeping flower-cups wave,
And forest-birds green leaves have strown
Upon the mound and cross of stone
That mark where, 'mid the wild-wood's
roses,
Their fair twin-forester reposes.
Soft be her rest in that green wild,
And—Holy Angels guard their child!
So sadly ends, my liege, the tale,
For sad my early fate hath been,
And the poor minstrel of the Dale
Thus young, the poet's fate hath seen.
That fate full oft my harp and I
Have mourned when Athwold hath been
nigh:

And now the transient dream is o'er,
Basely he probes afresh the sore,
As tattling of her father's cot,
He lords it o'er a lowly lot.

XVII.

For what, false Athwold—though my bride
Was not, like thine, the heir of pride;
What though the song I harp to thee
So oft, of thine own history,
Hath brighter close, and bids me chaunt
Thy triumph in the dark romaunt,
Say, traitor, if thou dar'st"——
But "Peace!"
King Edgar spake—"Thy quarrel cease!
Alban, I'll hear this tale of thine
Some other day, so thou'lt hear mine.
Perchance my song shall prove as sweet;
But, zounds! how burns this noontide heat!
Come, Athwold, I must Harewood see,
Why should a friend so formal be?
Well know'st thou, certes, that thy king
Cares not for cates and junketing;

And we who many years together
  Have lived through holy Dunstan's Lent,
And shared through bright and stormy
    weather,
  Penance with boisterous merriment,
Need not, for ceremonies, now
Waste the dull time in words, I trow.
Marry! I like not forest cheer,
Nor have I mind to tarry here.
Doubtless, at any time, thy board
Is worthy of its lavish lord,
And if so far, 'twere, surely, well
Sooner to leave this dismal dell.
Come, by the Rood! at once we'll go,
And, good my lord, our journey show;
For 'neath thy towers this night we rest,
And England shall be Harewood's guest!"

XVIII.

Haughty he smiled and grasped his rein,
And stroked his courser's arching mane.
But Athwold, ill his fears dissembling,
Was yet a courtier in his trembling.
Proudly he turned, and wheeled his steed,
Still pausing while he seemed to lead;

For well he knew the royal mood
And will, unwont to be withstood;
And more—he marked the ready band
Round gathering, at the king's command;
And right he read, sore vext were they,
The while they marvelled at his stay.
Then "Welcome!" cried he "thanes and
thralls,
My liege, thrice welcome to my halls!
'Twas but to see how large a boon
Thou could'st bestow, when I, of noon,
And scorching sun, and weary way,
Spoke, seeming to desire delay.
Right glad am I to find thy will
By such fond words unaltered still;
But, by thy leave, I'll hie before,
While thou more slowly journey'st o'er.
I would that all my serfs might wait,
When thou alightest at my gate;
And, by thy grace, will go prepare
All things for thine arrival there."
"Thanks, noble Athwold, thou shalt go,"
Said Edgar, "as thou wilt—but show
For us, who loiter here, our way,
Lest these dark woods should lead astray."

"The way," quoth Athwold, "is in sight;
Ye cannot fail to go aright:
Short space will bring thee to a steep
That shows, though far, my castle-keep,
And Harewood's halls, too mean to be,
Ev'n for a night, a home for thee."

XIX.

A graceful bow he gave the king;
Received a nod for answering,
And spurred his horse; his squires he stayed,
Then vanished in the thicket's shade.
But still his courser's tramping told
How swift he cleared the wood and wold;
And, list'ning, as the sounds, anon,
Grew faint and fainter and were gone,
The king, in reverie, sat still,
Nor loosed the tight-drawn rein, until
He heard no more the clatt'ring hoof,
Lost in the distance far aloof.
Then turned he moody round, and bade
His train move on; but slow, and sad,
And thoughtfully, he led the way
Toward the old castle's portals gray.

XX.

But let the minstrel string play on,
Though Athwold, Edgar, all are gone.
Not all—for lo! with aught but tears,
Young Alban from the wood appears;
And forth he rides, and up the mound
Spurs swift, till gained the vantage-ground.
And there, half-hid, afar he sees
The royal train, amid the trees,
Slow on their route; and—"Well-a-day!
They do not mark that I'm away!
I'll to my cot! The tale was good
I told them, by the Holy Rood!
And Edgar, o'er his fate and mine,
Goes mad to quaff the traitor's wine,
To feast with foes—or well, I fear,
To cheat me of my vengeance dear.
Poor Athwold! scarce his wile I blame:
Did ever knave a smoother frame!
I bore it well till truce he broke
And to the king of Marian spoke;
Then truce was o'er; as soon as said,
The ire of Alban vowed him dead.
Marry! the villain to the dust!
He pledged my love to Edgar's lust!

And, by the blessed Cross, he dies,
Though toward his hold so swift he flies.
Poor fool! he was full sore beset;
But honour claims its vengeance yet.
He jested of my sweet young bride:
Athwold, this night, thee woe betide!"

XXI.

He turned and through the wood he dashed,
And deep his spur his courser gashed,
Till, at a cot that seemed a hold
For holy hermit, made of old,
He stopped, and sudden from his steed
Bounded to meet a fay indeed,
A lovely sprite—that, to his arms
Flings from the doorway, in her charms,
And now is clasped by her young lover,
Who bends the trembling phantom over,
With many a kiss on lips whose breath
And ruby hue show naught of death.
A lovely ghost indeed, that, kneeling
On the green sward, hath human feeling
And woman's bloom! For see her neck
Suffused, beneath the braids that deck

And twine about that breast of love,
Which Alban bends so proud above.
Oh, faithless he! and can it be
  That he so soon should love another?
Or do I but a sister see,
  And is he then that maiden's brother?
Or can this be his muse, in sooth?
Or is it very ghost in truth?
Oh, but that spirits walk by night
  And are not in the daylight seen,
Who that might look on such a sight
  But saith, "'Tis Marian's self, I ween!"

XXII.

The "forester"—her father comes!
  Nay, not a forester he seems,
For still a minstrel rhyme he hums,
  And, though he waketh, walks in dreams.
And Alban, thou, in sooth to tell,
Hast played thy rogue-romancing well;
For not alone the king believed,
But Athwold, by thy wit deceived,
Nor dreamed they in a tale so fair,
Triumphed the fabling minstrel there.

"A forester!" and can it be,
This holy harper, then, is he?
"A forester, in outlaw's den!"
'Twas Athwold that was fabling then.
Though little did he reck the while,
The minstrel of old Harewood's pile,
Old Ethred, who so oft for him
Had waked his living lyre,
To show, though now his eye was dim,
His heart still glowed with fire;
That he himself was Marian's sire,
And, hidden in that dark old wood,
Beside the holy runnel bright,
Had reared to blooming womanhood
That child of loveliness and light.

XXIII.

'Twas even so: Old Ethred's care
Had hid his only treasure there,
To bless his poet sight, though dim,
With thoughts of holy cherubim,
And ever to his minstrel string
Notes worthy cherubim to bring.
And often, by his trellis'd door,
His minstrel notes were wont to pour,

When, 'scaped the castle by the feint
Of penance hour, the rig'rous saint
Turned not to sighs and torturing whip,
But, with a kiss for Marian's lip,
Was wont to court her praise, while he
Called up his warm old minstrelsy,
And to the breeze, and birds, and hills,
Gave out his soul-controlling trills.
You would have thought—to see them there
At morning, 'mid the greenwood fair,
Beneath an arbour's wreathing twines
Of roses and sweet jessamines,
Where, peering o'er the starry flower,
An ivied cross o'ertopped the bower,—
That he, with harp and locks so white,
Was, in the world of heavenly light,
That rapturous seer whose lip and lyre
Were lit of old by altar-fire;
While she, who, bending o'er her sire,
Smiled as she sung, and, singing too,
Inspired him with her glances blue,
Was, in that world, some angel given
To be the prophet's mate in heaven,

And lead him to the nook most fair
In all the shining regions there.

XXIV.

So there, by all but him unseen,
She dwelt amid the wild-wood green,
Till Alban found her : Ethred grieved
When first he felt himself bereaved
Of his sole right to Marian's heart,
By the young rogue's o'ermastering art.
For as a kinsman, first, he came
And wiled her with a cousin's name ;
Because—so Ethred said and thought,
"Their blood to mingling tides was brought
By Arthur's minstrel, Bert the Blind,
Who married Myrtis ; "—never mind,
Cousins they were—so let it be,
'Tis nothing now to you or me.
In short—a cousin is of kin
When loves or likings once begin ;
'Tis just the kith that's near or far
As friendships or aversions are ;
None but a dunce would urge its right
To harbourage for ev'n a night ;

It founds no claim, it lays no yoke,
'Tis thin as air and light as smoke,
But, let the smoke once turn to flame,
How tender is a cousin's name !

XXV.

Ah ! yes, when cousinage is blent
With common thought and hearts' content,
When mind with mind, and eye with eye,
Transforms that nothing to a tie,
Brothers and sisters may appear
More distant than a friend so near.
For, to some maiden sweet as light,
Give but young love a cousin's right,
Who shall describe the freedom's bliss
Her hand to clasp, her cheek to kiss ;
As sister near—but just removed
So far as to be more beloved ?
The sweetest nondescript in life
A sister—that may be a wife !
Such was shrewd Alban's creed just then,
In spite of Dunstan's cyphering pen,
For Marian's distant kin outran
The prelate's artificial ban,

That makes'a cousin oft too nigh
To marry, but ah !—not to buy.

XXVI.

Not such was Ethred's generous view ;
Her lover was his kindred too.
"I have no heir," old Ethred said,
"And dies my line when I am dead :
A line that in Pendragon's days
To royal ears poured loyal lays,
And lit the soul in Uther's child,
While yet in arms the hero smiled.
And now that line were lost ! but see
What Jesu's mercy sendeth me !
Thou, minstrel boy, shalt be mine heir,
And wed my child ; and she may bear
  Another such as thou for thine ;
So while her Druid oak is fair
  Shall flourish England's minstrel line ! "

XXVII.

  And such their sweet alliance then,
  Firm friends were they ; and now, again,
  With Marian met those minstrel men.

And what though one is young, one old,
Forgathered in that sylvan hold?
Their souls are knit by that kind tether
That bindeth noble minds together.
And "Ethred," said the laughing youth,
"They'll need thee at the hall, forsooth!
Lord Athwold hath a guest, to-day,
For whom a minstrel loves to play:
The king is come"——
"The king?" said he;
"Then breaks the long-sealed mystery!
Thy promise, Alban, was 'to sing
For me that story when the king
Should come to Harewood'; well I guessed
Ev'n then, there lurked within thy breast
A laughing quibble, that he ne'er
By Athwold would be bidden there."

XXVIII.

Then Alban sang, in pensive strain,
Of Athwold's secret joy and pain;
Of woes that beauty weaves for man;
That, since the tragic tale began

Of human love, have ever sprung
Earth's sweetest, fairest buds among :
The brood of that old serpent sire,
With breath and blighting eye of fire,
That first, to spoil a world for aye,
And wrest its dearest bliss away,
Came, long agone, to Eden's bowers,
He Beauty's bane, but beauty ours !

XXIX.

Oft, as her lover told the tale,
  The tear in Marian's eye would spring ;
But then the poet of the Dale
  Would wake for her a merry string.
And still old Ethred, all amazed,
As one who hears of magic, gazed,
And found himself, as 'twere a trance,
Enfolded in a dark romance
Now first unveiled ; but when 'twas known,
He added marvels of his own,
And paired the parts—for Alban sung
The story taught by Athwold's tongue,
With much concealed that Ethred knew,
Though now the whole he first could view.

XXX.

Their harps were silent long agone,
  And they themselves were earlier dust ;
And in their graves they're sleeping on
  Unmarked by chisell'd urn or bust ;
And Marian's self is sleeping too,
There where her virgin beauty grew.
But still the poet soul survives,
And still unquench'd it burns and lives,
And there shall flourish aye unbroke,
While thrives old England's Druid oak.
And gone for aye those minstrel days,
To them the bard his tribute pays,
Ev'n while he loiters, in the song
That, chance, should bear him brisk along ;
The story of that hapless peer,
  Which then they told in measured chime:
Which now I sing, though not, I fear,
  In such sweet verse, or flowing rhyme,
As then they sang to beauty's ear,
  Those poets of the minstrel time.

FYTTE II.

ELFREDA.

I.

No star but beauty's phantom ray
That lures, not leads, to light his way
A fearful path he treads, in truth,
Who walks the flowery maze of youth :
And strange as faery is the tale
Of him whose brighter stars prevail,
Who turns, his summer journey through,
In dreams to tread the way anew,
Nor sees, in all the past so fair,
One error that he need repair.

II.

'Twas so that Alban's song began ;
And thus chimed in the elder man :
"In vain may old Experience sage
Denounce the sentence stern of age :
The boy that sits his saws to hear
May, chance, the silvery beard revere,

And, awed, may mark the wrinkled face
That adds to words a grave grimace ;
But still he smiles within, and deems
Such maxims are but foolish dreams,
Which, like the hoary locks of him
Whose eye and lamp of life grow dim,
Are meet adorning to the brow
That waits a crown of glory now,
But ill would suit his amorous wile
Whose Fairyland is beauty's smile."

III.

'Twas therefore Wisdom's art, of yore,
To touch the heart by Fancy's lore
And fold this moral in a lay—
"How hard is the transgressor's way."
Learn, then, from Alban's song —not mine,
I but translate his Saxon line—
How it befell that Edgar's word
To Athwold seemed a serpent stirred.
Why falter'd he like lips that lie?
Why did he shrink from Edgar's eye,
Or why when, from that presence pass'd,
He found him in the wood at last,

Burned on his cheek the smothered glow?
Why turned he round and threatened so?
Why spurred so oft his jaded steed?
Why rode so raging? He had need:
For right he recked, the seal was broke:
The secret read, and all outspoke
The traitor tale engraved within,
Like some unsmothered spark of sin,
That smoulders long and dark below,
But bursts to blaze or e'er we know.

IV.

For this, so swift his courser strode,
Spurred o'er the old familiar road,
And cursed by lips more wont to say
With pride, "God bless thee, noble grey
My halidom! thy like, I ween,
Chased never over England's green!"
Poor Athwold had been sorely proved!
And, "fie on hearts that never loved!
Hearts that have felt a charmer's power,
Know well the frenzy of the hour
When first the favouring smiles are won
Of the dear eyes we doat upon.

Such hour the hapless peer had known,
And his warm breast had waged alone
Passion's fierce war with Duty's thrall,
Nor passed the fiery ordeal.
  So his was Treason ; but the name
  Deserves, at least, some milder blame,
  If Truth and Fealty are tame,
And all unwavering can endure—"
So Alban sung—"a lady's lure,
Unmoved, unyielding, undecoyed :
Happy the man if undestroyed ! "

V.

Sweet Marian chode. With roguish feint,
The minstrel argued his complaint,
And by the Talmud's legends drear
Enforced the railing on her ear :
"Oh, Adam from his Eden fell
For loving woman's love too well ;
The wisest of his sons denied
His God, to gain a heathen bride ;
And angels, as old Rabbins shew,
Left their pure homes to stoop below,
And lost their seraph-mates above,
Allured by mortal beauty's love,

And tempted, from their high estate,
To Satan's fall and final fate
By young Earth's daughters, and the face
Of woman's more than angel grace."

VI.

Hence 'tis the vulgar artist's trade
To rail at woman, wife and maid,
To taunt her with the woes of men,
  To boast his freedoms of espial,
And tell how oft and how and when
  He made the bold, presuming trial,
And found the tempt'ress—such, that he
Was fit her feeble fool to be.
Such bards have seen no vestal light
Ev'n in the Sibyl's glances bright;
And still the infidels are found
Who rail at Virtue's holiest ground;
Who liken beauty to a star
That shines in heaven, but omens war;
Or to that lamp that blazes bright
To mire the youth that trusts its light,
When o'er his all unguarded way
It throws its soft, delusive ray.

Miranda's innocence to scorn,
What Sycorax such sons hath borne?
Mine be the part—should I disclose
No history of a thornless rose,
To show its thorns are of the tree
That boasts the flower's support to be;
If wrong in woman's heart we scan,
'Tis somehow from the wrong of man.

VII.

But let me Alban's song regain
Nor interpose my prosy strain.
Gazing on Marian's charms the while
'Twas thus once more he won her smile:
"Daughter of Eve, thy heart and mind
Enfold the marvel of mankind;
And thine the mould that mocks his skill
Who shapes the marble at his will,
Or his whose pencil's magic hues
Might paint an iris in the dews.
Nor can the mightier bard essay
Thine inmost nature to portray,
When first to song, for thy sweet sake,
His own amazing powers awake.

Yet truest bards, in noblest lays,
Have sung of womanhood the praise,
How—as from Psyche's radiant wings,
The maid her sweet enchantment flings,
Wafting before the poet's eye,
In his first love and ecstacy.
And 'tis my creed—I would not live
Without the bliss such faith can give,
In woman's goodness to believe :
So many Marys for one Eve !
Let such complain as never knew
The chaste, the steadfast and the true ;
Sweet Marian, hear—I fancied ne'er,
The charmer frail, the falsely fair."

VIII.

High, on its tor the castle stood,
The crags above—beneath, the wood,
Where Ordgar dwelt, by men abhorr'd,
Of Devon's wilds the cheerless lord,
And claiming o'er its seas domain,
The pirate's right to rob and reign.
There first a birdling breathed unblest
A dovelet in a vulture's nest.

The mother-wing away it flew :
No mother's care the nestling knew,
'Twas so the young Elfreda grew.
Nor, as her ripening beauty shone,
On Ordgar's sight, a bud half-blown,
Melted the soul of that stern sire,
Too proudly selfish to admire.
Still, in that lone and dreary wild
He made a pris'ner of his child ;
And save the monk that went and came,
Her grim old aunt, a stately dame,
And maids that sighed but never laughed,
And one that taught the broid'rer's craft,
Little of human life she learned,
Though oft her soul within her burned,
She knew not why. Her father knew,
And gazing on her eye so blue,
He mutter'd oft—"I would mine heir
Were only not a flower so fair."
And so he watched and held her there,
In dread of Edgar's lawless flame
That blasted wheresoe'er it came.
"Not born for consort of my king,
She shall not be a baser thing:"

So chafed he, fierce, and—such his rage—
Locked fast the ringdove in his cage.

IX.

Not often, to the meads below,
Elfreda with her hawk might go,
Where all the sweets of flowery June
Breathed from the woods, 'neath sun and
moon,
Or where the fox-glove, thick as heath,
Empurpled all the dells beneath.
Like that Levantine bird that flies
In palmy islands far away,
And finds no mate in those bright skies,
For there alone she lives her day,
In air that never, till she dies,
Is fanned by fellow-wing, they say,
Elfreda dwelt, and knew no friend,
But one the poet's art that kenn'd.
Save when at eve her voice would blend
With that old minstrel's harp, who sung
For many a year, those halls among—
She lived as if the desert flower,
That blooms and breathes at morning hour,

Not only shed its sweets in vain,
And gave its odours to the waste,
But vexed its little soul with pain,
And *knew* its fleeting bloom misplaced ;
As if the pearl, that in the deep
Its hermit watch long years doth keep,
Were loth to light its elfin cell
With its own lustre, still repining
In loneliness unseen to dwell,
And lavish there its peerless shining,
Where not the sea-maids' selves might know
How wonderful the lustrous glow,
Encased within so rough a cover,
Tossed by the tumbling surges over.
But beauty like the light must beam,
And ever will some wanderer's eye
Be dazzled by a roving gleam,
A gleam he never meant to spy,
That comes as evening meteors stream
Across the summer's cloudless sky ;
Yet more might like the glow-worm seem,
That shuns, not seeks, the passer-by.

X.

Ev'n so, when once with horse and hound
The sport swept by the castle's bound,
Sweet she looked forth from her high bower,
In beauty like that modest flower
That, from beneath the flaunting rose,
  Peered out, on a high festival,
To see what queen of flowers they chose,
  And was, herself, made queen of all.
She saw, and she was seen by one
Long wont such shapes to doat upon :
And Alban's minstrel-harp soon sung
  The charms he triumphed to discover,
And her sweet name in music rung,
  Which he could praise, though not her
    lover ;
For ever was the minstrel's lyre
Devote to light the fancy's fire,
And she, so fair, but claimed his art,
While Marian held both harp and heart.
Else—tho' Love's star outshines the Sun,
Elfreda soul and voice had won ;
And ne'er to Edgar had he told
Of beauty hid in that dark hold,

But for *himself*, with high emprise,
  Had woo'd her from her lonely bower,
Or for one glance of her bright eyes,
  Had scaled, by night, her lighted tower.

XI.

'Twas heard anon, her charms might lure
Peri or ouphe or sylphid pure;
And Edgar, from the minstrel's tongue
  Had caught love's madness with the tale;
And oft he heard the story sung,
  By voices viewless as the gale.
Elfreda was a fairy's name,
  And fairies seemed to love it well;
For oft, at witching eve, it came
  O'er his soothed senses like a spell.
He was a visionary king,
  And now he loved on Rumor's word,
His own divine imagining,
  A phantom bright as Eden's bird.

XII.

Presumptuous lover!—he had spurned,
When first with boyish flames he burned,

The hallowed cloister's sacred pale,
And from the vestal torn the veil.
"What is a monkish wall?" he said;
"And what these niches of the dead?
Alcuin himself might scorn these aisles—
For there the pictured Virgin smiles."
He trembled, though resolved to dare,
Beneath a scutcheoned window's glare,
Where kings were imaged —frail as glass;
And—"for the love of this sweet lass,"
He muttered—"Dunstan I defy;
Sweet Edith, I for thee would die."

XIII.

Here let old Ethred interpose
His monody of Edith's woes,
For well the fair recluse he knew,
And saw her sullied splendors too.

INTERLUDE.

I.

"So Edith, from the altar torn,
Where white-robed sisters sing and mourn,

Left chant and litany awhile,
To worship only Edgar's smile.
Nor grieved she for the price she paid,
Rapt from the cell a trembling maid,
No more in weeds to kneel and sing,
But walk the idol of a king,
Till all too soon the spell was o'er!
Of bloom bereft, she charms no more;
Forsaken, friendless, hopeless now,
Shame's burning brand upon her brow,
In bitter grief she weeps alone,
O'er young content and virtue flown;
And sighs, despairing, for the rest
Forever fled her thorny breast,
Which once in holy joy she felt,
Or e'er to aught but God she knelt:
Or e'er, for days of guilty mirth,
She traced her footsteps back to earth,
And offered, at a mortal's shrine,
The incense lit for loves divine."

2.

"And Edith is an added spoil
To trophies which but seem to foil

The lustre of his vaunted art
O'er woman's too confiding heart.
So, many a gem we thought a treasure,
And many a flower that gave us pleasure,
Is worthless all, when others dearer—
Sweeter in scent, in brilliance clearer,
Turn from our first delights our eyes,
And dazzle us—a brighter prize.
And man is fickle in his loves
As that gay bee that idly roves
Through Iran's meads, on gauzy wing,
To sip its sweets and leave his sting.
Cruel the imp, though gaily drest,
Crimson his coat and gold his crest,
In form and hue and all outside
The honey-maker, glorified,
But, all within, the spider's guile,
His venom and his web, the while.

3.

"With fatal kiss the rover goes
Where opes its bud the fragrant rose;
Then to the lurking violet flies,
Tarries and tastes and onward hies;

Till, stooping from his airy flight,
The lily's bosom, pure as white,
Like woman's too confiding breast,
Welcomes the spoiler of its rest.
The flower, beneath his treach'rous wings,
Trembles and bows, yet clasps and clings,
As fair Titania's pearly arms
Might fold her Oberon in charms.
Forewarned, let innocence beware,
Nor trust the wily suitor's snare ;
For ah, how soon, its nectar rifled,
He leaves the flower with which he trifled,
Courting new pleasures, day by day,
And wafts on wicked wing away.
Go, seek his toy, the garden's pride,
And see how soon the lily died :
'Neath the hot noon, her glory fled,
How lowly drooped her graceful head,
Or, drenched with tears of even's birth,
How fell her spotless bloom to earth."

XIV.

So Edgar soon his Edith spurns,
And faithless to Elfreda turns :

Unseen as yet, yet prized the more,
Like houris of Arabian lore,
Adored, as ever the unreal—
He loves her lovelier ideal.
But she is sprung of noble line :
  Her father is a mighty earl ;
And not a monarch's loose design
  Can tear from him his darling girl.
Elfreda may be his alone
Purchased with half fair England's throne :
"Then who more fit," said he, "to reign
  Than Ordgar's daughter, Edgar's queen ?
In sooth he is the noblest thane
  That hunts in England's forest green :
And, by the Rood ! I'll make her bride
Ere ring the bells for Christmas-tide :
And Athwold shall be sent to sue,
If monarchs must like monarchs woo :
For who so faithfully can bear
The embassage of England there ? "
So, Athwold, smiling doth depart—
He fears not for his faithful heart,
Nor dreams how hard the task will prove
To feel and speak another's love.

Nor, to the monarch's heart of flame
Aught of mistrust or question came,
For Edgar knew not prince or peer,
Bishop or baron, far or near,
So wise in counsel, brave in fight,
So true in absence, sure in sight,
In proof so strong, so unbeguiled,
As Athwold—till Elfreda smiled !

XV.

The tale is of those Saxon times
Whose chronicles are red with crimes ;
Of that fierce age, depraved and base,
That sullied Christendom's fair face,
And, filling up its thousandth year,
Threatened the Judgment, drawing near.
Dead was imperial Charlemain ;
His weakling sons, that could not reign,
Their spendthrift parts had played with fate,
And lost fair Europe's proud estate,
While Nicholas made the game his own,
And won by dicer's arts their throne.
Then the red seals began to ope
That to the world disclosed a Pope,

In England, Alfred's days were gone,
And deep penumbral dark came on,
Ere fell, on her, the black eclipse,
That myst'ry of th' Apocalypse,
Which o'er the churches, far and wide,
Throned a Grand Lama, deified.
Yet was the Church of England free
And pure, as in such days might be.
The Christ alone her Lord and Rock;
Her wedded priests still fed the flock;
None to lay lips denied the Cup,
Nor was the Housel lifted up;
No goddess was the Blessed Maid,
Nor, save to God, was worship paid;
The Creed was undefiled and whole;
No forced Confession wronged the soul,
Nor yet was Rome's chief-pastor more
Than Patriarch-primate, as of yore.

XVI.

But, times were near, when locusts came,
Legion their form and fearful name;
And soon, in Albion's fleecy fold,
The wolf of Tiber tithed and tolled.

In Edgar's day, 'twas Dunstan brought
The monkish horde such change that wrought,
Intriguing, scheming, scowling, smiling,
All conquering and all defiling,
Till he that wore St. Bennet's gown,
Master'd the monarch as the clown.
The village-priest he came to ban,
Woman to wile, to war with man,
And chaplains swarmed in court and hall,
Who all things made themselves to all,
With dames and princes naught austere,
All complaisance to Beauty's ear;
Italian monks who brought from Rome
Tales to corrupt each English home,
Of Theodora's shameless trade,
And of the popes Marozia made.

XVII.

Ye hills that stretch from earth away,
Where human feet infrequent stray,
How oft your hoary heights have been
Man's refuge from his fellow's sin.
But not, on yonder crag, the light
That gleams so oft at dead of night,

And, to the fisher's skiff afar,
Shines forth, a homeward guiding star,
Betrays the wakeful saint and stern
Whose tapers on the altar burn ;
For there a gentle lady sighs,
And wakes, to feast her sparkling eyes
On Taliessin's charming page,
Or reads of Arthur's golden age
In rapt Aneurin's pictured lines,
Whose sweet romance her soul entwines,
With marvels of fair fancy's flight,
Fairy and dame and noble knight.
Why should a maid such follies learn,
Why o'er such tales her taper burn?

XVIII.

Robed in the rich embroidered vest
Which oft the Saxon beauty dressed,
  Her arms are bare from their smooth bending,
  With pearl-drops from the short sleeves pending,
  The bright enamel softly blending
With purer flesh—like snow unstained,
Rounded and dimpled and blue-veined.

And as she readeth, her sweet breath
Moves, its transparent lawn beneath,
The bosom where her heart reposes ;
Nor more than modest charms discloses
When part the dainty folds asunder,
Clasped by the belt that girds them under,
A jewell'd and an envied zone ;
Not envied for its gems alone.

XIX.

Sweet bells she hears : adown the dale
A village steeple graced the vale,
And now the chimes, for midnight prayer
Come faintly on the stilly air.
The lady hears, and kneels to pray :
At least—her compline she would say.
Her white hands grasp her portforie ;
Her cross depending to her knee—
—It glittered once by Alcuin's cassock,
Shines brightly on her purple hassock,
And all the luxury of prayer—
Its outward grace and form are there,
Nor is it for frail man to say,
The maiden only seemed to pray.

XX.

'Twas Alban's mood—such gibes to throw
As made sweet Marian's blushes glow,
But Ethred would not brook his child
Should waver, in her thought so mild,
Or, of his lady's faith devout,
And pious prayers conceive a doubt.
Nay, Alban—"let a sacred strain
Of mine, reprove suspicions vain.
Once I surprised a white-robed maid,
Kneeling apart, yet self-betrayed,
Where, though I lent nor eye nor ear,
And quickly turned, lest I should hear,
I seemed as fair a sight to see
As Gabriel erst, in Galilee,
When the blest Maid and undefiled,
Gained promise of her holy child ;
When for all virgin souls, like hers,
That holy Infant's worshippers,
Redemption's song she first outpoured
—My soul doth magnify the Lord.
And be it in the minster gray,
Where pious throngs keep holy day,

Or at the altar's hallow'd pale
Where kneels the bride, beneath her veil,
Or in the closet, still and lone,
Where the sweet rite is all her own,
  A lady bending her fair knee,
  It is a goodly sight to see,
  So pure the prayer of purity."

XXI.

Another day—another hour :
It finds Elfreda in her bower
Watching the blue loft's earliest star
  Nor dreaming, in the western sky,
That glittering gem seems fainter far
  Than the large lustre of her eye.
But would ye know what she is thinking
'Neath the soft twilight's starry blinking?
She longs for sympathy—to greet
  Some loving life, some cheering tone ;
And sighs—"How dull this castle's seat,
  And my sad youth how drear and lone.
My foolish heart goes out to meet
  Some kindred throb, some thrill unknown,

To answer with responsive beat ;
Like ivy o'er the gray wall grown,
Springing its bounds, yet meeting there
No prop to stay its tendrils fair,
And swinging in the sullen breeze,
Loose as an idler's reveries.
Too soon I seem the foliage sere,
That dies before the mellowed year,
In the dull hues of hope deceived,
Or fading visions, fancy-weaved."

XXII.

Our exile from a faithful heart
That feels afar a kindred smart,
Is like the durance of the bird
That first her shining plumage stirred
In Indian climes, 'mid flowering wreaths,
Where every breeze with incense breathes,
And where, in spicy brakes, they caught her—
That now hath crossed the stormy water,
In our cold skies condemned to shiver,
And sing glad notes, though caged forever :
But fair Elfreda's was the woe
Of birds that, natives of their prison,

Are sad of sight and song, although
  In the pure air they ne'er have risen.
They know not what it is they love,
They know not they would soar above;
And, gazing on the calm, clear air,
Scarce dream they long to waft them there;
Yet is an impulse in their wings;
  Their growing plumes were made for flying;
And so Elfreda's spirit springs
  And spurns the dungeon where 'tis lying,
While in her soul the young emotion,
  The thought she knows not how to name,
Like wings that hover over ocean,
  Nor day nor night can tire or tame.
There is a prompting in her breast
That would o'erspring the parent nest—
A secret in her bosom lurking—
Mysterious nature! thine own working.

XXIII.

With her own thoughts thus wont to muse,
And watch the fading daylight's hues,
The lady lingers, till the moon
Is shining 'mid the stars aboon,

With showery beams, like mists, that pour
A silver light on sea and shore.
It mocks the sorrow in her heart,
  She yearns for one to share that sorrow :
Yet, in her soul, so void of art,
  She knows not whither she would borrow
The fond reply, the answering smile,
That might her loneliness beguile.
Then to her lofty cell again,
Her harp to touch, in plaintive strain ;
To sing a song her chaplain taught,
—From Italy 'twas newly brought,
And breathed of that fair captive land,
A spirit monks might understand.

ROUNDELAY.

I.

"The breeze it is that opes the rose ;
  The breeze it is that doth destroy :
Love is the source of all our woes,
  But first the fount of all our joy.
The life of love, like summer's day,
  Is always beautiful at morn ;

But ever, clouds obscure the ray
  Of early love, so fairly born.
Anon the shadows roll away,
  And then, anew, outbreaks the shining,
And shineth on its bright'ning day,
  Most beautiful at life's declining!
But ah! not oft of virgin breast,
The earliest, purest love, is blest:
Too oft the victim at the altar
Hath found her voice, in tremblings, falter,
As, even while she lisped her vows,
She loved another than her spouse.
For sweet first love, it triumphs never,
Yet tints and tinges life, forever:
A clouded hue, that lurks below,
Howe'er they garnish o'er the woe,
Or weave a tricksy wreath above
The faded woof of blighted love."

2.

"And yet the dawn of love is bliss—
  A bliss that surely turns to sorrow—
And he that gives his first love-kiss,
  May kiss those lips no more to-morrow.

And thou, who seemest Love's sweet twin,
  Unless indeed thou art his daughter,
If now thy dreams of love begin,
  Like rosy light on some clear water,
Deem not that he who charms thee first,
  Though thou hast charmed, will e'er be
    thine!
For ever what is earliest nurst,
  Though brightest, fairest in its shine,
  Is fleet to perish as the pine,
That quick consumes in od'rous blaze;
While that which liveth years and days,
  Like vestal light, undimm'd, undying—
Is after-lighted—when decays
  The fire that was the censer's trying.
Then, as with Persian scents perfumed,
  Or rooms with burning sandal brighten'd,
How steady is life's way illumed—
  How all its gloom and dark enlighten'd!
The Lord that loveth all indeed,
Doth never break the bruised reed,
But lulleth aye the gale to peace,
When Spring hath shorn the lambkin's
    fleece:

Yet that pure flame to mortals given,
That seemeth all earth shares with heaven,
Is ne'er for us without its tears;
And even like our infant years—
So bright, but oft so cloudy turning,
While we, to learn to live are learning—
Ev'n such—ah, not like theirs above—
The early dawn of human love!"

XXIV.

When morning o'er her eyelids broke,
To such a dawn Elfreda woke:
The dawn of love—for Athwold came
As speeds the May-fly to the flame,
Herself in youth's delightful bloom,
The light alluring to consume.
Yes, Athwold came—ye know the rest,
Young gallants, that have manly breast:
Why should I say—he came, he saw,
Was conquer'd! Change stern Nature's law,
That will not brook an acted part,
Or bear a mask before the heart,
And we may blame him, that he knelt,
The maid to woo, her sire to melt,

And won her hand—no, not to bring
His lovely conquest to the King;
  But, in the fever of his flame,
  Her beauty, as his own, to claim!
  'Twas rash, but who, that loves, would
    blame?

XXV.

And she was proud betroth'd to be—
For who so brave a knight as he,
Or where the noble in the land,
Of lordlier heart, of bolder hand?
Her lord was only less than King!
And sure, to wear his plighted ring,
To be his watch-word in the fight,
And, shielded by his falchion bright,
Upon his manly arm to lean—
Was this not—next to being Queen?
She never dreamed she might have been
Her sov'reign's bride—confiding fair!
Yet seemed some whisper in the air
Of fiend malign the thought that stirr'd,
And breathed that first ill-omened word.
Happy she seemed: not yet she knew
Passions within that shrunk from view;

And when her lover said good bye,
You should have seen her watchful eye
Follow her Athwold, as his steed
Bore him afar, with slackened speed—
Forgetful of herself—and dim
With tears the sight that followed him !
She started—as a foot fell near ;
'Twas her stern sire's; she shrunk with fear.
Sullen he passed and saw her never,
  As phantom-like she trembled there,
He like hoar winter, chill'd forever,
  She like the May's sweet-breathing air.

XXVI.

Athwold had gained the lady's heart ;
But, when that moment came to part
  He woke—to what he was—and nigh
  He trembled, as he framed his lie,
  To think of Edgar's searching eye.
Yet listlessly he met the king,
And plained as if a trifling thing
Had drawn him from the court aside :
—" What ! such a maid to be thy bride !
Forbid it all ye saints serene,
Edgar should reign with such a queen !

Sweet Edith, lowly born—yet bore
Of grace and stately presence more :
But Ordgar's child !—he makes too free,
A robber and a pirate he,
Aspiring on her brows to set
More than an earldom's coronet !
The bird, I found, too good—tis true
For him, in such a cage to mew,
But, by her nurture in that hold
A peasant's lass, and shy as cold,
Speechless—in short, mere furniture
Moving awry, with look demure :
And worse than all—poor hapless creâture,
Her sordid sire in every feature !
To think of her, in Edgar's court ;
Of dames and dowagers the sport,
Of shining maids and courtiers young
The jest—on every whisp'ring tongue ! "

XXVII.

"And so," quoth Athwold, "while I staid
In Devon's dreary halls, the while,
I paid no suit, nor proffer made,
To gain, as bid, the lady's smile,

But ventured, though in duty's way,
For once, thy will to disobey.
I spoke of war and sport, but ne'er
Hinted my real errand there,
And still, my unconcern to prove,
I talked of everything but love.
And now return'd, a faithful spy,
I wait my sovereign's mandate high :
If still thou deem'st it well to woo,
  Still may thy first desires be done ;
Right glad will I return to sue,
  And yet the maiden may be won ;
But if thou yet wilt trust thy friend,
Better thy courtship here should end,
For thus thou art untrammel'd still—
My liege, I wait thy further will."

XXVIII.

The monarch praised his courtier's art—
He dream'd not of his treach'rous part—
But trusted his report as true
As though himself had seen and knew.
Anon, so strong the fable proved,
He all forgot he e'er had loved ;

Such love is easy to dispel,
And she, in fancy lov'd so well,
Was soon forgot. A gem desired
Is valueless, if unadmired ;
And charms that oft beguiled before,
If others scorn, are priz'd no more.
But Athwold in a merry hour,
When Edgar prais'd Elfreda's dower,
And, o'er the bumper which he quaff'd,
Loud at her fabled beauty laughed,
Asked—as in sport—his leave to wed
The treasured maid ; for wealth, he said,
"He more desired than fleeting beauty—
Better to him was golden booty !
And so, if Edgar lov'd her not,
  Himself would woo her for his own ;
Haply she'd suit a courtier's lot,
  Though all unworthy of a throne."
"Have her !" said Edgar, flushed with wine ;
"None but an angel shall be mine ;
But—'twas well said—no Queen for me,
What booty she would bring to thee !"

XXIX.

So Athwold went and claimed his bride :
  The monarch knew not what he gave—
Elfreda clung to Athwold's side ;
  But he, rash man, now doubly slave,
Was ever fearful, though he smiled,
Like deer that hath been hunted, wild,
And startling ever, lest the breeze
Should whisper his dark treacheries.
And so, imprisoned still, he kept
His wife, where all her youth she wept ;
Nor dared at court, or banquet high,
Display her to another's eye ;
With miser fear and craven care,
Hoarding his sparkling diamond there—
Like Jew, to hide his pelf immense,
In beggar's garb that sues for pence.
But shall we pity more the maid,
Allured to sorrow, love-betrayed,
And sad as when she wept alone,
And his, who wrong'd her of a throne—
Or him, poor man, whose sorest fault,
  Seemed but the love to her he bore ;

The dupe of passion's blind assault,
  The victim of a siren shore?
Who for her sake his faith had broke,
  Yet durst not tell the price he paid;
Who fear'd each word his sovereign spoke,
  And careful every answer made;
Who mused in loneliness, and kept
  His thorny secret with a sigh;
Who dream'd of evil when he slept,
  And woke with terror in his eye.
His—his, alas! the keenest woe,
  Whose festering conscience stole his rest
Yet found its deepest, sharpest throe,
  In her reproachful eye and breast,
Whose fatal charms had lured him so,
To deeds that she should never know,
  To crime that must not be express'd.

XXX.

Not to herself, as oft she moaned
  In absence, o'er her hopes deferr'd,
Not to herself, the countess own'd
  Passions in her deep soul that stirr'd;
Only she sighed—"So soon forgot?
My husband—yet he loves me not."

Said I not well, if woman errs,
Not oft the primal wrong is hers?
Of men—save minstrels and a squire,
Elfreda knew her cruel sire,
Her priest and Athwold—only these,
Enough her budding life to freeze.
And who shall say, so poor the range
Of her sad youth—the tale is strange
Of what the annalist portrays,
The story of her later days?
What marvel if a rankling wrong,
Estranged her from herself ere long,
And chased afar that angel wing
That o'er us waves in youth's sweet spring;
Till she—whose name might gild the page
Of yet another Alfred's age—
Stands darkling, where the royal gore
Stains Corfe's curst gate——but nay, no more!
Why lift on sin's last act the veil,
Or turn from Athwold's crime the tale?

XXXI.

Fond man! like truant boys that stray
Far from their homes, a sunny day,

In chase of gilded moth or fly,
  O'er hill and dale, untired, unthinking,
And turn not back their dazzled eye,
  Till now the golden sun is sinking—
So he, decoyed from truth and duty,
Had followed far the wing of beauty,
And thoughtless of the forfeit dread,
  Had seen alone the brilliant bait,
Nor paused to think, nor turned his head,
  Till now, alas! 'twas all too late.
Where shall he turn? To Court he flies,
  For he can meet the sternest there;
But ah, those bright reproving eyes,
  That shine at home he cannot bear.
Charming they are, but every glance
Is keener far than foeman's lance!
He's robbed her of a crown, and she
Has loved him all unconsciously.
He has repaid that love with love
  As warm, as fervent, as her own;
But how shall he that fervour prove,
  Whose double wrong has wrong'd the throne?

XXXII.

He viewed her with a colder sight,
Who was so late his dear delight ;
Yet not for her he wore that scowl—
He lov'd her yet—but treason foul
Was in his heart, and never he
Could smile away his treachery.
And hapless, now he felt the sting
  That an o'erburdened conscience gives :
Slave to himself, a heartless thing,
  Ev'n in her eyes for whom he lives ;
Reft of the joys his crime had sought,
And in his own dark meshes caught.
So, ever he that feeble proves,
'Mid earth's ten thousand luring loves,
And yields his soul, his heart beguiled,
To pleasure, so too lightly styled,
Must find, at length, beneath her thrall,
His drop of honey draughts of gall,
And learn how soon the sweetness cloys,
Of Folly's bowl—forbidden joys.

XXXIII.

Seldom he comes—and soon he goes
From her sweet arms, his sole repose,

"—'Tis passing strange," the menials say,
"Our lord should leave his halls, to-
day."
She chides him not, but gently cheers
The parting-hour, with hopes and fears.
His horse awaits ;—he seeks her side,
With—"Must I leave thee, lovely bride !
I go, but will anon return ;
And when I go again," said he,
"Mine angel, thou shalt go, and learn
How poor are all, compared with thee.
Oh, would thou mightst be with me now ;
But ah, my perils wouldst thou share?"
She mark'd his changing cheek and brow—
"Thou ne'er shalt know my dangers
there !
Yet love me, lovely wife, for well
My heart repays each kindly smile—
Oh, might I but love's daring tell !
But no !—remember me the while-
I must away." A sparkling tear
Hung on Elfreda's kindling eye :
Forgotten were her wrongs, and dear
As the warm tide, that, flushing high,

Glowed on her cheek, her Athwold seem'd.
On his proud neck she fell ; he bent
And kiss'd her trembling lip, and dream'd,
One joyous moment, that he leant
O'er one that loved him : on her breast,
That throbbed with many an answering sigh,
Dropp'd his warm tears—his nodding crest
Could not conceal his moisten'd eye.
Oh, it was good to see them there,
The beauteous and the brave embracing!
His snowy plumes, her golden hair—
The tears of both past wrongs effacing.
But love's short, painful transport o'er,
His squires attend—he must away.
He turned him from his lofty door,
Blest by her smile, that wooed his stay—
He went, alas! to go no more,
As then he went, that happy day!

XXXIV.

For oh, on earth, the serpent's breath
Has drugg'd each bliss with poisons fell ;

Each flower is but a blooming death,
  And Pleasure's sweets still scent of hell.
So Athwold found, but not at first,
  For when at Edgar's feet he knelt,
  The monarch stifled what he felt,
And calmed the storm so soon to burst.
But all was known : some bird in air,
  Or Rumor's black and omened wing,
Had borne the dreadful secret there,
  And woke to rage the injured king.
All seem'd as peaceful as before ;
But when some jovial days were o'er,
Edgar led forth his merry court
Afar, to join in forest sport ;
And soon the hunting of the morn
  Was ordered by the wily king;
For this we heard the echoing horn,
  And saw come forth that joyous ring.

XXXV.

And oh, for this did Athwold turn
So deadly pale ; for this did burn
So hot within ; for this he fled
So frantic from the rout he led ;—

And 'twas for this that Edgar, reft
Of his strong stay, and lonely left,
Paused one blest moment, to forget
His bitter wrongs, and linger yet
On all of honour that he knew
In Athwold, while he yet was true;
Perchance to drop one generous tear,
O'er England's brave but faithless peer.

FYTTE III.

ATHWOLD.

I.

He who hath stood upon the steep
Above Parthenope's blue deep,
Recalls the Siren's voice and strain,
Nor deems that poet's warning vain
Whose tomb, with myrtles girt and bays,
The modest height afar displays.
Still from the grot, that opes anear,
His echoes reach the list'ning ear,
And if I rightly catch the song,
'Tis thus his moral they prolong:
Oh, it is easy to descend
The flowery paths in woe that end,
And, lured by Folly's frolic ray,
To leave the light of Virtue's day,
And down the swollen stream to glide
Of Pleasure's smooth deceitful tide,
Till, far from Reason's sterner bound,
Grief and Remorse come frantic round.

But ah! with ruined peace and rest,
With wearied hope and sighing breast,
Back, back again that steep to climb
That falls from Wisdom's height sublime,
Or up the troubled tide to stem
That rolls o'er Honour's buried gem,
Is harder far than poet's lay
In cheerless proverbs might convey,
If but a fable's close may tell
What prophet ne'er might preach so well.

II.

Fast from the monarch's wearied train
Lord Athwold's courser flew,
Spurred swiftly over heath and plain,
And swift the forest through.
With muttered oath, and vengeful vow,
He dashed the copse amid;
Yet breathed not forth his ire, I trow,
Nor vented half his rage, till now
Far in the wild-wood hid.
Then fierce outspoke his wrath, and loud
To the vexed winds revenge he vowed.
Oft came his curse as on he rode;
Swifter his foaming courser strode;

For in his torn and reeking side
Deep were the rider's rowels dyed ;
And, swifter still, from Athwold's eye
The shafts of frenzy seemed to fly.
"Curst be the hour," anon he cried,
"That gained for me my hapless bride !
And doubly curst"—uprose a bird,
He thought an arrow's whiz he heard,
Or close pursuit. But on he went ;
Wings to his flight his fury lent,
And, sore aweary, on he flew,
  Himself sore spurred by frantic fears,
Till breaks a smiling vale to view,
And, far, 'tis Harewood's wall appears.

III.

It was a strong old castle, gray
  And dingy with the swart of time ;
And many a tale of olden day
Proclaimed it seat of mortal fray
  'Twixt rival lords and fearful crime.
High peered its dusky towers in air ;
  But, though it seemed so drear a hold,
Full many a tale of pleasure there,
  And love romantic might be told.

Oft 'neath its roof the boisterous bout
  And jovial wassailing had been ;
And oft the long-resounding shout
Of merry thanes, in joyous rout,
    Those halls had heard, I ween.
And there bright eyes had often shone,
    Or wept, unseen, I trow ;
And many a lovely bride ; but none
So lovely as the lonely one
    That there was pining now.

IV.

The lady, in her casement's bay,
Sat where a windharp chanced to play ;
That harp by miracle that sings,
No touch of mortal on its strings,
A dreamy supernatural shell,
—'Twas Dunstan's wonder-work, they tell :
"And give it only air,"—said he,
"Angels shall wake its minstrelsy
And shed around a pensive tone
Responsive to the spirit's moan."
The prelate to Elfreda's lord
Gave this strange harp of wond'rous chord,

And to her window came, each day,
Creatures unseen its strings to play;
And now she listens—while her ear
Seems such a song as this to hear:

1.

"Is there an ill like loneliness,
When mountains swell 'twixt youth and love,
Nor oft the angel-visits bless
Of our love-laden carrier-dove!
Is there an ill that hath no cure,
More sad, more grievous to endure,
When not alone the evil saddens,
But long-indulged remembrance maddens,
And absence groweth to despair,
Not in itself so hard to bear
As that o'eradded ill it brings—
That we have none our grief to share,
Or feel how deep our sorrow stings!

2.

Oh! sure the dove that went of old
Out o'er th' assuaging water, bold,

And found no rest for weary wing,
O'er greedy waters hovering,
And backward hied, unwont to roam,
And sought again her prison home,
Was happier far, though stifled there,
Than that which 'scaped to purer air,
And found a rest on some sweet shore,
But went, and was beheld no more."

V.

The lady starts—the sighing breeze
Another sound has borne :
Afar, a mounted knight she sees,
And hears his larum horn.
'Tis Athwold, for 'tis Athwold's steed,
But 'tis not Athwold's pace :
He comes as if from martial deed ;
For see, the barb's hot haunches bleed,
And flushed the rider's face.
Why comes he red and raging so?
But list—the drawbridge-chain !
Rings on the stony court below
The horse-hoofs' steel amain :
Startled, she rose ; the colour flew
From her soft cheek, and chill the dew

Rose on her snowy forehead dank—
"Athwold!" she cried, then faint she sank:
As instant, breathless, at her feet,
And frantic with the fears he felt,
His heart full fraught with passion's heat,
His eye all frenzy, Athwold knelt.
He spoke not;—there they were awhile—
The trembling beauty, and her lord—
Like statues in a minster aisle:
A scene that spoke, without a word.

VI.

Moments there are when words are vain,
When heart with heart must lone complain,
When sighs for sudden ill or grief,
Together blent find sweet relief:
When breast, to troubled breast allied,
Pours forth the spirit's struggling tide;
For not with feeble words of woe
The soul's full fountains overflow;
Nor oft with anguished cry or groan;
But, like the soul, unseen, unknown,
Prevail the sorrows of the night,
Till breaks as silently the light.

VII.

Such did the breathless moment seem
  That saw them sad and silent there;
A thrilling space! But when the dream
Passed off, there came a tender beam,
  That bade him all his ill declare.
  Frighted, for once, to see her fair,
Athwold looked up—an angel's eyes
  Were sparkling glorious in his own;
And shall he lose so bright a prize?
  Oh, 'twas enough, the thought alone!
Short is his time. A moment's space,
  And he may hear the hated horn
That calls him from her blest embrace,
  Never, ah, never to return!
He looked once more on that fair face,
  As if her inmost soul to learn.

VIII.

And back on his her eye was bent,
  In sympathy for griefs unknown;
And her soft voice—what healing went
  To his torn heart in every tone!

O'er his bowed head awhile she leant,
  And seemed a minister of love
On mercy's errand kindly sent
  From ever-blooming homes above.
A moment's glance at such a face,
  It seemed enough her soul to know;
Sure, never was such heavenly grace
  Blent with a heart untrue below!
So Athwold fondly deemed, when deep
His inward soul no more could keep
Restrained the swollen tide, that long
Had struggled with its barriers strong;
The fount must flow: but is she true?
  He looked, half doubting — doubted still;
But looked once more, and now he knew:
  That rosy kiss has sent a thrill
Through his deep mind that banished fear.
"Yes, thou shalt all my story hear,
And I will trust thy love; for sure,
Those eyes, so tender and so pure,
Bespeak a heart as pure as they,
And mild as their own holy ray."

IX.

He told her all his story then,
  And all her tangled history too;
And oft her visage changed; again
  It changed, and silently she drew
  Her fluttered breath; and as she knew
Each chequered mystery revealed,
All open now the secret sealed,
She trembled, glowed, then pallid turned;
But ah! as from his lips she learned
His treachery and his crime confessed,
How deep she breathed, how throbb'd her
    breast!

X.

But, was her sigh for Athwold then?
  She heard, with innocent surprise,
His well-smoothed narrative; but when
  He told her of the gorgeous prize—
The throne through his dark fault she
    lost,
The tale, though all so fairly glossed,
Was yet, for one imprison'd there,
A cruel mock. Her forehead fair

Clouded—perchance or e'er she knew,
And Athwold saw ;—'twas death to view !

XI.

Like dimples on an ebbing tide
The wreath, the name, the reign of bride,
How transient is her hour of pride !
Rightly we deem for days so fleet
All flowers should yield their every sweet,
For never yet young wife could brook
Frown or neglect or alter'd look ;
That he who swore her honeymoon
Through life should last—should change so soon ;
That he who knelt her hand to crave,
Should wound the trusting heart she gave.
Ask, then—that moment of surprise—
What meant the tear in Elfred's eyes?
While her fresh bridegroom yet was he,
His captive and his victim she,
How could she more than pity?—how—
Even when her taper fingers played
With the brown locks that decked his brow,
And o'er his noble forehead strayed—

How could she more than sorrow shed
On his devoted, friendless head?
How could she feel but this alone:
How sad his fate—how hard her own?

XII.

Oh, there are fays of poets' dreams,
Maidens of gay romancers' themes,
Women of fable, who had ne'er
Allowed cold self to enter there;
Who of a bride's best days bereaved,
  For him, for him alone had wept;
And, rifled of a crown, had grieved
  That still the secret was not kept:
Who ne'er had for a moment brooked
His haggared doubt, as wild he looked
For calmer smiles, with pardon fraught,
But to forgiving breast had caught,
At once, his longing, fond embrace;
And—all the angel in their face—
  Had whispered to his troubled ear
  Love's magic words, the storm to clear,
  And bid the darkness disappear.

Who doubts such gentle wives have been?
But ah! though oft in fables seen,
Not oft such angels stoop below!
Nor oft shall erring mortal so
  By erring mortal be forgiven!
It were a blessed thing to show
  Elfreda's inmost heart a heaven;
But ah! chill history bids me veil
  The feelings then of either breast;
For not a fable is the tale,
  But sternest truth in numbers drest.

XIII.

But his dread secret all disclosed,
And her full eye to his opposed,
Say, doth it glow with rays that light
The frown of his appall'd affright?
And will she grant the one poor boon—
  The last rash venture of his fears
Which his chafed soul must urge so soon?
  Or, fearful thought!—
                But, sparkling tears
Gemmed the long lashes of her eye;
And oh! perchance the deep-drawn sigh

That stirs her bosom is for him!
"I'll trust," he cried, "the drops that dim
In such dear eyes the cheering ray!"
But hark! what echoes far away?
Alas! 'tis Edgar's signal heard:
Athwold has turned to kiss, once more,
His fatal bride, like that poor bird
That, when the vulture hovers o'er,
Still woos his mate with billing love,
Nor heeds the talon'd death above.

XIV.

So long with her alone! and yet
He hath not dared the boon to crave,
For which an hour agone they met—
For which that guilty tale he gave.
But now he prays on bended knee,
With trembling haste and stammering tongue—
While still he listens, fearfully,
To Edgar's lengthening larum rung—
That she will not one boon deny—
One last, poor promise. She has given

Such promise, in her sorrowing eye ;
  And Athwold trusts it, ev'n as heaven !
He prays her, ere she greet the king—
  For such the luckless art he tried—
From her fair hand to doff the ring,
  From her white brow the veil of bride ;
  To fling her coronet aside :
Nay, like a peasant's lass to be,
To wear the guise of low degree,
  And long as Edgar might abide
In Harewood's halls, his eyes to shun ;
"For oh ! such charms, my lovely one,
  If to such eyes they should appear,
  What have I not, alas ! to fear ?
Oh, think of what for thee I've done,
  And still thy once-loved Athwold hear !
Say, Elfred, tell me, is it won—
  My poor request ? The king is near !
Answer—oh, answer ! At the gate
I hear him ! Heavens ! he must not wait !
Nay, hark ! they call !—'Tis all too late !"

XV.

Ling'ring, yet forced to fly, he turned :
"Is, then, my last entreaty spurned ?"

Still looking back on her, he flew ;
  His eyes his fading hope betrayed.
Did she assent? He never knew ;
  He left her fainting, fallen, afraid—
Left her—but ye shall judge full soon,
Whether she gave or not, the boon.
At his high gate he met the king,
And greeted all the attendant ring :
While Edgar marvelled thus to see
  His suite so simply ushered in,
And wondered that it so should be,
  When Athwold surely must have been—
So swift he rode—before them there
Full long enough, with loyal care,
    To range his vassal train.
Or, chance !—suspicion's horrid flare
    Gleamed o'er the monarch's brain :
And—"Fool was I," he inward thought,
  "To let him thus escape ! Who knows
What horrid plot that hour hath wrought,
  Of subtle vengeance on his foes?"

XVI.

But Athwold had, the while, forgot
  The poor pretext his frenzy made ;

Nor could divine why every spot
  King Edgar's falcon eye surveyed.
O'er the paved court the train he brought,
  And at the lofty portal said
A seeming welcome to them all.
  But Edgar feared the host that led,
And cautiously he trode the hall.
  For he had heard of hated kings
By their own vassals trapped and slain ;
  And minstrels sung of dreadful things
Done by the dauntless regicide,
    Or by the lawless Dane.
Such tales as these they fabled wide,
    Though yet the bloody thane
Had not o'er Duncan's pillow bent,
To leave it all with gore besprent,
    To wash his hands, and reign.
In gloomy forms an hour they spent,
  For each the other's actions feared ;
So dull passed off their merriment,
  Till now the banquet-hour appeared.

XVII.

Dread hour for Athwold. To his board
With formal words he led his lord,

Where—as in masque for Christmas-tide,
Welcomed her king his dazzling bride.
  A peasant's lass her garb beseemed
Ev'n as her husband's whim proposed,
  But beauties Edgar had not dreamed
Her jupe of shepherdess disclosed.
Deep her chaste kirtle veiled the knee;
Yet shone in moulded symmetry,
The tapering ankle, nude and white,
As moved one dimpled foot and light,
In soft receding demi-pace,
The court'sy's gliding step of grace,
Through thin disguise of village maid
That all the high-born dame betrayed.
Her lips of rose, not wholly mute,
Breathed rev'rent words, with voice of flute:
O'erflowed her shoulders smooth and bare
The golden glory of her hair;
A silken snood her forehead crossed;
Her belt nor gold nor gems embossed;
And from her dais, in form and hue,
When flashed such charms on Edgar's view,
Seem'd some sweet native of the skies
In star-like sheen before his eyes.

XVIII.

Back drew the king: the peers amazed,
On Elfred and on Athwold gazed;
While warm her blushes purpled o'er
  The lustre as of Dian's cheek,
And brightened—all too bright before—
  Fresh beauty, which the fatal freak
Of such attire the more displayed,
And Edgar's heart its captive made,
Like flowers, with death in their perfume,
That ravish with their deadly bloom.
Kindled king Edgar's wrath the while,
And Athwold knew how false his smile,
As to the feast the wondering throng
  And hapless host together turned;
And vainly rose the banquet-song,
Though sweet the measure, smoothly strong,
  For fury's flame the rivals burned,
And oft with rage the courtier saw
  His sov'reign's dalliance with his bride;
Not Edgar heeded duty's law,
  When throned the Queen of Loves beside.

XIX.

The while an aged minstrel sung:
He tuned his harp to love;
And still like youthful poet's tongue
The witching, wooing numbers rung,
Though cold his hand, the chords among,
And white the flowing locks above.
Oh, muse divine! thy magic sealing
Stamps so deep each hallowed feeling,
That life's winter, wont to sever
Love's sweet ties from human heart,
Harms the sacred poet's never
With his all unholy dart.
Oh! the poet loves forever,
Comes on loving errand hither,
And, though all its fibres wither,
Still with love his heart is warm—
Warm with youth's inspiring heat;
Or, if fevered, 'tis the storm
Of life's first glow that nerves its beat—
For his heart is fervour's seat.
Ne'er can poet's heart grow old—
Never can his life-blood chill;

And, though age about him fold
Its winter mantle, 'mid the cold
He wears it like a poet still.

XX.

An eastern tale the minstrel gave,
By one who served the caliphs taught ;
"A knight of Spain, he loved a slave,
And from an Emir's palace caught
The brightest pearl of all his hoard."
Such song heard Edgar at the board ;
At least its fervid close he heard
And listen'd to its every word,
While thus of Beauty, artful praise
The bard poured forth in wily lays.

I.

The captive knight would often moan
"—Ay, 'tis not good to be alone ;"
Yet oft I marvel as I muse,
What—had it been for man to choose,
What—had no higher thought supplied
All he could covet in his bride—
What had the wit of man express'd
Of one to share his soul and breast ?

Give him the sculptor's fancies bold—
Had he—the maiden's shapely mould,
Devised—or ev'n one dimple's charm,
Lurking in dainty cheek or arm?
Give him, with painter's pencil true,
Of pearl and rose, each tint and hue;
Give gold and azure with brown shade
Such as in forest fount is laid;
And bid him, of himself supply
What best would please his soul and eye:
What might supremest skill invent?
What like that world of wonderment
That comes on youth's enraptured sight,
In woman's flush of morning light?

2.

For beauty means what God design'd,
What perfect came from perfect Mind:
But let some godlike power be given
From heaven itself to dream of heaven,
Let glorious types of beauty there
Be brought to less etherial air,
Or grant an Adam might conceive
To match his own the shape of Eve;

Be given, the moulded form of wife,
The woman—lacking yet her life;
Her Parian clay, without a spot,
Her hues of health, but breathing not;
Say, what we love, who next should give?
Who bid the woman's spirit live?
Or who inspire the grace of mind,
In which a purer self we find—
A nature—human all—but then
Eluding and bewildering men,
  With something of a world unknown
  Man cannot wholly make his own,
  In flesh of flesh and bone of bone?

3.

Like lights that make the Arctic day
How flash her fancies as they play;
O'ermastering logic with a tear;
With Passion's pulse deposing fear;
With Faith, the starry steep to climb
And calm in suffering, so sublime!
As varied rhymes in minstrels' words,
As notes diverse in music's chords,

So woman's ways with ours combine,
To frame a harmony divine,
Her sweet unlikeness chiming still
With what is deepest in our will;
Her thoughts, emotions, gentle powers,
Twins to our own and yet not ours,
Creating, in our darling blent,
Our heart's unrest, our heart's content—
Sweet music, for the monotone
Of what was selfish all and lone;
And giv'n our nature to transfuse
Till all we are in her we lose.

4.

Oh! strange that Nature should supply
To gentleness and symmetry
Such hidden strength—that, mightier far
Than man's supremest forces are,
Bows kings and heroes at its feet,
And sets to conquest bound and mete.
Sooner shall human thought invent
New stars to gem the firmament;
Or sooner, all the flowers of May
Come by mere chance, so fresh and gay,

Than ought save skill and thought divine,
Might woman's mystery design.
Homage to him such charms who made
Be ever by his creature paid ;
Nor let mere Paynims bow the head
To say—as poor Mohammed said,
When Zeyneb to his sight unveiled
And all her loveliness exhaled,
"O miracle of earth and sky ;
O ravishment of heart and eye !
How marvellous, is Allah's plan,
His thought of such a mate for man !"

XXI.

So it was, this aged bard
  Sung of love like youthful lover :
And a smile was his reward,
  With a coronal to cover
His white hairs that told the story
Of the poet's hope of glory.
Now when age and years declining
Made the wreath scarce worth the twining,
Oh, 'twas given—and tears bespoke
    How dear it once had been ;

But long and cold neglect had broke
    The harper's heart, I ween.
Yet, minstrel, weep not! Ever so,
    Since Scio's wanderer sung,
The poet hath been heir of woe,
With ne'er a kindly smile to throw
A light upon his path below;
Till chilled at length his rapture's glow,
  And numbed his hallowed tongue.
Then comes too late the wreath: and yet,
Surviving grief shall pay thy debt,
  Though all unknown to thee.
  And where thy holy tomb shall be,
No doubt full many a wreath shall wave
Above thy consecrated grave;
And many a weeping form be bent
Above thine urn-crowned monument,
To mourn thine unrewarded song,
When harp in hand—thy journey long
Thou wentest, ere the brighter days
When lips are mute that speak not praise.
Why should'st thou weep? The harp is
    thine!
What need of bays thy brow to twine,

When that thou hast? Oh, minstrel, sing!
There's magic in the tuneful string,
And power, that makes amends alone
  For the rude world's unlavished smile—
Though none requite, its gentler tone
  May still thy hermit soul beguile.

XXII.

Again, he sang—and soft the lay,
That bade the tender passions play,
Was witching Edgar's soul away.
But Athwold checked the notes of wooing—
Charming was their amorous cooing,
But they warbled his undoing,
  When that hated guest was near.
"Sing, old bard, of war!" he cried;
And the minstrel's harp replied
  With notes to warrior dear.
Of Uther's dauntless son he told,
That led the Christian prowess bold
    'Gainst faithless Frank and Dane,
And spread so wide the fame of old
    Of blest Messiah's reign:

Then flamed the harp, such notes that
flung,
And rapture fired the poet's tongue
As each stern giant's fall he sung,
That cursed the cross in vain.
Oh, glorious was that cross emblazed
Upon the banner Arthur raised—
And terrible the vengeance wrought
When Arthur's sword for Jesu fought—
And short the cursing caitiff's breath
That Jesu's mercy spurned in death!
But ah! his notes, they change to woe;
They wail the hero's overthrow,
And dying, fading on the string,
Still chiding weep, and weeping sing
Of false Guenevra's broken vow—
Of Launcelot, traitor to his king—
Of Mordred's dark deceit, and how
Excalibar away did spring
On that sad field where Arthur fell:
Though still consoling legends tell
How Arthur lives and loves the while
In Avalon's enchanted isle.

XXIII.

Then godlike Alfred's reign of gold
In golden numbers sweetly rolled
    Adown the poet's lyre:
He sung how Alfred was a bard,
And how he passed the Danish guard
    In holy bards' attire;
And how he gave the pilgrim bread;
And how he lodged in peasant's shed;
And how he reigned, and how he read,
    And was a nation's sire.
Of Leolf's deadly arm he told,
    And Edmund's heart of fire,
That slew the daring robber bold
That bearded him in royal hold,
    And waked his tiger ire.
And oh! of Edwy's grief he sung,
And her dear love to whom he clung—
    His fair but hapless bride!
Then checked the strain; the lady's ear
Must not the cruel story hear,
    Of how Elgiva died.

XXIV.

And so, through all the banquet long,
The harper poured his magic song,
Nor left unsung the worthy praise
Of royal Edgar's sunny days.
Oh, Edgar was a king of kings!
And as the poet touched the strings
In laud of him, with flattering guile,
The ravished monarch heard the while.
Then higher as the numbers rose,
And still his fame, at every close,
    Seemed mounting to the skies,
    He sought Elfreda's answering eyes,
If haply now her envied smile
    With his might sympathize.

XXV.

How comes it that in every hour
Of pomp, of triumph, or of power,
We turn from every joy about,
From self-applause, from people's shout,
From flowers below, from wreaths above,
To seek the smile of those we love?

How is it that the poet's bays
Charm not his heart like lady's praise?
How is it that the monarch's throne
Can never glad his heart alone—
Or, girt with peers, such pleasures bring
As when soft woman owns him king,
Thrones him in heart, and to his sway
Yields hand and all her life away?

XXVI.

So Edgar's met the beauty's eyes,
And soft the glance they gave;
How came like death the chill surprise
O'er Athwold's spirit brave!
And she, frail Helen of the fray,
Full oft amid that stifled play
Of passions, frantic though enchained,
On her sad spouse her glances threw;
And, sharply, he, though well he reined
The fury that so frantic grew,
Turned oft to meet her gentle eye,
For roving glance of sympathy;
But met, alas! from her he loved,
Compassion's kindly cruel beam:

A smile of sorrow, that still proved
  All love was gone; or that did seem
Perchance its lone, last lingering ray,
When love in pity melts away.
Then changed her sight, with such a look
As never lover's heart could brook:
'Twas sympathy with sorrow blent.
It changed again as Edgar leant
Enamoured, o'er her beauteous breast;
And idly she the king addressed,
In words as fickle, and as free,
As words from beauty's lips might be.

XXVII.

Oh, like the stroke of larum bell,
That beats the prison'd felon's knell,
And, 'mid the dungeon's silence dumb,
Gives dreadful note his hour has come—
Broke that soft voice on Athwold's ear.
'Twas worse than agony to hear!
All hope was o'er; his last weak stay—
A whim at best was swept away;
And now his soul is taught to view,
In all she doth, some terror new.

With haggard gaze, and thought as wild,
He marked how faithlessly she smiled;
And ah! with maddened brain, he deemed
  Elfreda never shone so fair,
As now by Edgar's side she seemed.
  And, truth, they were a noble pair!
And Edgar felt the bitter wrong
  That such a jewel of his crown
Had been a traitor's prize so long;
  And he himself, like churlish clown
All unavenging—smiling ever
  On the base rifler of his rest,
Still unsuspecting, dreaming never
  Of stranger plumage in his nest.

XXVIII.

Like that poor bird whose toil-built cot
  Is prey for every roving wing—
Who buildeth, but enjoyeth not,
  And still, all innocence, doth sing:
Like that poor bird were his the lot—
The pang of consciousness and thought
King Edgar felt. "And was it I,"
  He said, "have been a villain's tool

'Gainst mine own peace, unwittingly—
  My servant's wittol, and his fool?"
Sunk his proud heart within; and, stung
  Ev'n to its core, he scarce could keep
The flaming fury from his tongue,
  That in his spirit burned so deep.
Nigh did his restless steel forth-leap,
  Full often, from his belted side;
But cooler reason bade it sleep,
  Though ne'er before so fiercely tried.

XXIX.

So, by a hated rival wooed,
Sat Athwold's bride, in facile mood,
On Edgar answering glances throwing—
Those dear young smiles, that once were glowing
For him alone; but now were shed
On his lewd rival's haughty head.
All unadorn'd her strange attire,
Yet Athwold's gnawing soul of fire,
Even from her artless beauty, drew
New proof that she was all untrue.

What though he saw his prayer obtained—
The boon he asked, tho' luckless, gained?
Clearly, at last, he read her thought,
How with his spouse his wish had
wrought;
When wildly from her presence flying,
He left her frighted, unreplying,
Fallen in fear, and faint as fair,
To gem and deck her shining hair,
Or leave its golden wealth to flow,
As beauty's art might best bestow.
"Oh fool!" he sighed, "deem not for
thee
She chose so unadorned to be.
The lovely trait'ress knows full well,
Of native charms the mighty spell.
No need of pearls or bride-wreath set,
Nor coronal to grace, nor yet
To win the lord of England's throne,
Aught save her eyes' soft light alone."
Thrice fatal prayer and boon for him,
Who, knowing loveliness is dim,
And only dim when veiled and hid
With fashion's gauds—had rashly bid

Th' unveiling of the bright surprise,
At such an hour, to Edgar's eyes!
And Athwold, now but deeper caught
E'en in the toils himself had wrought—
Of hope, of conscience, peace bereft,
Lovelorn and friendless, lonely left,
Must feel this folly with the rest—
The barbs that rankle in his breast.

XXX.

Yet long upon those charms he gazed,
  Now his no more—for ever lost!
Still as he looked, compelled, he praised,
  While raged his spirit, tempest-tossed.
Not she the veil, the gem, the ring,
Needed to win that amorous king:
'Twas but herself, undeck'd, to show,
To teach the manly breast to glow;
And fairer to the royal heart
She seemed, unaided all by art;
Though still king Edgar quell'd his love,
While hate within did sterner move,
As oft he looked, admiring more;
But when the banqueting was o'er,

And the red wine went circling round,
The deep-drained bowl at length unbound
The cords that held him in control,
And loosed his fury-fretted soul.

XXXI.

Elfreda from the hall had gone;
And Athwold now, with foes alone,
Frenzied, full oft the goblet quaff'd,
And o'er each brimming beaker laughed.
He laughed; but such a laugh well nigh
Might seem the mockery of a sigh!
He turned; and Edgar's burning eye
Flash'd full on his—
"We'll pledge thy bride,
Thy lovely spouse," the monarch cried,
"And curse on traitors, far and wide!"

XXXII.

Athwold, full charg'd with smothered ire,
Felt on his cheek the blazing fire:
"A curse on tryants!" loud he rung,
And frantic toward the king he sprung.
Aback the frighted nobles drew;
Swift from his scabbard vengeance flew;

But round their sovereign quick they closed,
And his descending blade opposed.
"Slave!" cried the king, and broke the
throng;
But struggling Athwold turned at bay,
And through the courtiers struggling strong,
Hewed with his steel a bloody way.
He gains the door—the court—the gate!
"He flies!—pursue him—cut him down!"
But he has 'scaped beyond their hate,
And, screened by moonlight's shadows
brown,
He sees th' astonished train pursue:
He marks each former jealous mate,
And marks swift-mounted Edgar too;
Wildly he hears him peal halloo,
And rings the cry the wildwood through.

XXXIII.

"To horse!" Anon a servile throng
From the old gate-way burst;
He hears them as they howl along,
Ay, hears himself accurs'd.
Heavens! his own vassals are engaged
In hunt of him!—then, thrice-enraged,

He moans, while all his heart-strings
writhe,
"Oh, how unlike the hunting blithe
We joined at morn." But hark! at fault,
The baffled train are hasting back.
"So soon give o'er the fierce assault?"
Nay, harken! list!—they cry—"The
pack!
Ho! put the bloodhounds on his track."

XXXIV.

The curdling blood refused to play
In his full veins; but fury lent
What Nature gave not, and away,
Faint, panting, reckless all, he went.
He heard them to the castle flying,
He heard them shouting, and replying;
Oh, Holy Rood! and now he hears
The hungry hounds. 'Tis in his ears—
The burst of their unsated yell.
So, in full cry come up, they tell,
For shrieking souls, the hounds of hell.
The bark rings out—away he flies:
Oh, God be bless'd—the howling dies

Afar—afar; they scent astray;
Yet on he went, away—away!
The breeze swells up—'tis nearer now—
That cry once more. He knew not how,
  But on he flew; and though no goal
Bounded that race, he ran, until
O'erspent at last, he reached a rill
  And slaked his thirst—then climb'd the knoll
That from that forest-valley swells
To hills beyond. No more the yells
Of the hot bloodhounds does he hear,
But yet their echoes stun his ear;
And up he strains. A distant bark!
And upward still;—but rest thee! Hark
  'Tis silent now: nay, list!—perchance
Some fox is stirr'd;—up, up he toiled:
  The height is gained. A swimming glance
Back on the moonlit vale he threw;
There stands his castle! They seem foiled
In their pursuit, and calm the view.
  He reeled, and came a blessed trance;
He swooned, and gently down he sank,
All senseless, on a shadow'd bank.

XXXV.

Again, the pack, but far away!
Faint grows their howling: they're astray;
  Some game's afoot that saveth him,
And o'er the hapless man to-day
Th' untiring bloodhounds shall not bay.
He heard not, knew not;—there he lay,
  His eye-ball as in death 't were dim.
Is this brave Athwold? Let him rest,
Even where he lies; his troubled breast
And harass'd limbs have need of rest.
Faint, breathless, helpless, seemed his soul
Well nigh had gained its mortal goal,
When came the trance; but then he fell,
And slumbered babe-like, though the yell
Of hound, and man more merciless,
Fast on his toilsome trail might press.
Ah! little thought he, when at morn
He waked the echoes with his horn,
That those high hills, which far he viewed,
Crown'd with blue mist and azured wood,
Or towering bleak with naked height,
Should lend his only lodge at night!

XXXVI.

Nature's own pillow gave him rest;
And there, as on a mother's breast,
He slept as ne'er before he slept,
While o'er his swoon the dew-drops wept.
  And who so heartless, had not shed
  A tear upon his houseless head,
As there he lay, an outcast now,
The night-wind cold upon his brow,
  And fallen upon that chilly bed?
Yet dreamless slept he. When he woke,
He found him 'neath a tangled oak;
A nodding thicket veiled his view,
But he just saw the starlight through.
  And then again he slept; and well
And long he rested, till he thought
He heard a voice. He woke: 'twas
      nought!
  He must have dreamed it; or the swell
Of the cold breeze his ear had caught.
  List!—Is it nothing? Something fell
On rustling leaves: What passeth there?
Perchance poor Reynard from his lair,
Some startled doe, or timid hare:

But he was wakened, and he rose.
Silent he muses; scarce he knows
How, why he's there.
'Twas dead of night,
And from his covert lodge he stole.
The westering moon still poured its light,
And, truth, it was a gentle sight,
But soothed not Athwold's soul.

XXXVII.

He lean'd him 'gainst a rock that, lone,
Forth jutted, where the moonbeams shone,
And, for a moment, mute he stood,
Wild gazing from that mountain wood,
On the broad plain outstretch'd beneath,
That seem'd—for fogs o'erhung the heath,
A maz'd mirage, a sea of death.
Beyond, full sadly he surveys,
Bleared by the moonlight's silvery haze,
His forest hydes, his fields, and all
That, won of old from stranger hands,
Pertain'd to Harewood's ancient thrall;
And now to him—his dowry lands.

His throbbing forehead aches to view:
  But worse, when next he turns his eyes
  Afar where dingy turrets rise,
Murky, though moonlit, peering through
  The mist that in the valley lies.
The towers of Harewood—there are they,
  The moonbeams on their bulwarks
    streaming;
But ah! a soul-distracting ray,
  From one bright oriel gleaming,
Is torturing poor Athwold's heart
With jealousy's envenom'd smart.
'Tis from Elfreda's lattice high
That hateful light invades his eye;
And ah! who knows but there it lights
A rival, to unhallow'd rites,
Where Edgar, at Elfreda's side,
  Caresses one so late his own;
Perchance, already calls her bride,
  Or rends with impious hand her zone.

XXXVIII.

His bursting temples, and his eye,
That from its socket seem'd to fly,

With the fierce vollies, loudly rung
Hot from his heart and fever'd tongue,
Tell how his inmost spirit burns.
With fist fast clench'd, to heaven he turns,
And "Here I swear," he cried aloud,
"On thee, my love's despoiler proud,
Revenge, that ne'er shall slake before
It drinks thy false heart's warmest gore.
Bear witness, heaven—My wrath shall be
Baptized in blood! Oh, might I see
Ev'n now the tyrant, face to face;
God and good angels, grant me grace,
His life shall pay"——
The thicket broke
Sudden beside him as he spoke.
"Draw, then, thy sword"—a voice replied,
Hoarse mutt'ring; and, with sturdy stride,
A vizor'd shape before him stood:
"Draw, wretch, and make thy promise good!"
Aghast, he turned. His sudden foe
Had raised his falchion for the blow;
And dark he stood, his eye of ire
Through his grim beaver flashing fire.

An instant, and they closed in strife—
Clash'd their keen sword-blades fierce and rife,
Athwold, with nought to lose but life;
His foeman, not his life alone,
Perchance, a courtier—or a throne.

XXXIX.

The pale moon sunk at last, and fell
Set the dread dark o'er mount and dell;
Not even the twinkling stars were seen,
For the dun clouds were rolled between.
'Twas then that vizor'd shape, so late,
Knock'd at the castle's postern gate,
And by the porter's lanthorn dim
View'd his light wounds with triumph grim.
Weak was his voice, and faint his hand;
But, as he drew his batter'd brand,
That yet was stain'd with gore undried,
"See, there's thy master's blood!" he cried.

XL.

And when the purpled morning broke
O'er that brown heath and forest hill,

A passing woodman, as he woke
  The early echoes, whistling shrill,
As to his morning toil he fared,
  Stopt short where Athwold's lodge appeared:
For lo! the deep-scarr'd soil was bared
  Of its green sod, and dark besmeared
With recent blood, and stamps of heels
  Screwed on the turf; and lo! the brake
Curtain'd by tangled shrubs, reveals
  A slumberer—whom he strove to wake,
Nor strove in vain; but backward sprung,
When Athwold, with enfeebled tongue
And glassy eyes—a moment seemed
As one who lay entranced, or dreamed,
Then clasp'd his hands—
  And feebly cried,
"Sweet Jesu—mercy!"—so he died.

XLI.

Yet not the minstrel's rhyme may tell
By whom he bled—by whom he fell,
For ancient story ceaseth here;
Yet pray it ne'er may truth appear

The minstrel's self, in anger's fire,
Had stain'd the hand that swept the lyre,
And claimed a fearful vengeance so,
Against his tamed and humbled foe.
Some deem that Edgar's self pursued,
Alone, his victim to the wood;
And, searching through the forest dark,
His vow of treason chanc'd to mark:
While others tell a sadder tale,
And say the Poet of the Dale,
Disguised as Ethred, beard and all,
Sang at the tragic festival;
And wily, by his art inspired,
Timotheus-like, the monarch fired;
That by *his* craft, unguarded stood
The gate that open'd to the wood;
That 'twas from *him* Lord Athwold quailed
When his bold arm the king assailed;
From *him* he flew; but, in the weed
Of harper old, they did not heed
What next he did. And while the rest
Rush'd boist'rous forth, as liked them best,
He stript his masque, his beard, his pall,
And slipt unheeded through the hall;

And loos'd a stag from out the park,
To call aside the blood-hounds' bark,
Nor lured alone the pack astray,
But wiled the baffled king away.
So then light-armed he sought the wood,
To make his morning promise good—
That vow profane for Christian breath,
"Athwold this night shall sup with Death."

XLII.

The secret in their tombs must sleep,
Who wrought the tragic story deep;
Though still the Muse, in doating, saith,
(She would not harm her minstrel son,)
Whose chace was crown'd by Athwold's death,
Let him be deem'd the guilty one.
But loyal thralls and subjects said—
And shook the superstitious head—
"'Twas ne'er the king; for Alban's dart
Had cleft, that morn, the stag's stout heart,
While Edgar's, though it aim'd to kill,
Was but a bloodless arrow still;—
An augury that well should show
The noble Athwold's midnight foe.

XLIII.

And this ere Autumn's leaves were falling,
But ere the Christmas chimes were calling,
The merry bells, I ween, rung round
With a gayer, sweeter sound
Than ever they had rung before
For Britain's monarchs wed of yore.

XLIV.

'Tis the dark and sombre aisle
Of an old cathedral pile;
Yet its arches gray are gleaming,
And the swinging censers steaming,
As aloft they waft the prayer!
Now the organ rolleth there;
And, as sweet the hymn is stealing,
By the altar-pace are kneeling
    The noble and the fair.
Hark! again the organ pealing;
And from glittering cross to ceiling,
  See the waxen tapers flare.
  Surplic'd boys those tapers bear;
And the figure, stern and grim,
That beneath the rood-loft dim,
  Comes to bind and bless the pair,

'Tis St. Dunstan—he whose throne
England's Church supreme doth own,
Patriarch and Primate he
In St. Austin's ancient see.

XLV.

His mitred head is o'er them bending;
List! the whisper'd vows ascending—
See how rosy smiles the bride!
To the priest she hath replied;
And the wreath is on her brow,
And the blessing said; and now
Ring ye merry chimes once more!
Joyous ring—the bridal's o'er!
  And adown the stony aisle,
  Cheer'd by many a beauteous smile—
  Her own more beautiful, the while—
Walks the lovely, newly wed,
By her royal bridegroom led.
Strew with evergreens her way;
Yule is near—let all be gay.
Bring the sacred holly now,
Bring the Druid's mystic bough,
Ring ye bells—let trumpets sound,
For the bride she shall be crown'd—

She shall live and reign serene
Edgar's and merry England's queen.

ENVOY.

But thou, mine own fresh-featured land,
Dear from far cliff to ocean sand:
Bright clime where sinks the setting sun—
Last which the day-god looks upon;
Where blooms the bay-tree in its pride—
Not that which by old Delphi's side,
Entwin'd with myrtle, crown'd, of yore,
The warrior bard whom Doris bore—
But that which o'er savannahs blows,
More fair than Daphne's laurel-rose—
The broad magnolia, branching high,
With odours for the summer sky,
Whose leaves the angel-muse of song
Hath planted our green shores along,
To crown the poet-race which here—
Her last, best boast—she means to rear:
Bright land of river, rock and wild,
Where nature charms her poet child,
Though clear thy skies and broad thy waters,
Thy glory is thy radiant daughters—

Maidens like those for whose sweet smile,
Of old, in their maternal isle,
The minstrel oft hath sung the lay
That gains their gentle ear to-day;
Nor deem'd the idle tale he gave
Should cross the undiscover'd wave,
And by a kindred race be known,
Who call his laurell'd harp their own.

NOTES.

This poem is founded upon the facts of King Edgar's marriage with Elfreda, as they may be found in any English history, a mere statement barren of details. For the general outline of Anglo-Saxon manners I have been forced to rely on Sharon Turner, though a great variety of histories, ballads and literary treasures were ransacked for the original scheme of the story. It is almost needless to say that I have felt myself free to adopt some words unknown to the times in question, and to idealize the social state, according to poetic license, but trying to observe the just limits of such license.

The poem is dedicated to the daughter of a beloved friend and kinsman, a man of taste and culture who died young; and reference is made to her maternal grand-father Thomas, ninth Lord Fairfax of Cameron, and to the old Virginian traditions connected with his family history.

(1) p. 13. The Saxon conquest of Britain is the epoch here referred to. The Saxon barbarians were, in one sense, conquered by the ancient Britons, and they received the Christian religion and their superior social laws, in course of time, if not

from the Britons, nevertheless from their fellow-Christians and kinsmen of Armorica. Intermarriages among the noble classes were at first so few, however, that the idea of this stanza must be taken with great allowance for romance.

(2) p. 16. St. Hubert was then in fashion as patron of sports and huntsmen. He has left his name to a poor little hamlet in Belgium, in the "forest of Arden," where he was buried A. D. 825. The Abbey Church where he is supposed to be entombed is a fine building.

(3) p. 18. The names of the tributary princes who once acted as oarsmen on the Thames for King Edgar are here introduced.

(4) p. 18. Alban of the Dale is a purely fictitious character, bearing a Roman name, which was honored alike by the Britons and Saxons.

(5) p. 19. Athwold is an abbreviated form of *Athelwold;* but the name is often given as *Ethelwold.*

(6) p. 26. The forest of Harewood is the historic scene of Edgar's chase, which resulted in the death of Athwold and his marriage with Elfreda. The castle may be regarded as a fiction.

(7) p. 29. The *pixies* are the fairies of Devonshire. See Coleridge's reference to them prefixed to his "Songs of the Pixies."

(8) p. 33. St. Dunstan, though not then "sainted," was Archbishop of Canterbury in Edgar's time.

(9) p. 40. This reference is to the prophet Isaiah. See Isaiah vi. 7.

(10) p. 43. Uther, the father of the almost fabulous King Arthur, was "Pendragon" of the Britons. This title was equivalent to that of chieftain, and it is often used as a surname.

(11) p. 50. I have here credited to the Talmund an ancient superstition of the Jews, based on Genesis vi. But see Josephus.

(12) p. 53. The *tors* of Devonshire are its cliffs, or crags.

"*Tor* in that country jargon's uncooth sense
Expressing any craggy eminence—
From *tower*." COTTON, on Derbyshire.

(13) p. 53. Ordgar was the name of Elfreda's father; but though I have borrowed the *name*, I have made a fictitious character out of the very probable elements of life and habit in the Devonshire chief of those days. Ordgar may have been a very decent sort of person, and this explanation is due to the possibility that he was such in point of fact.

(14) p. 57. This "modest flower" was the violet, according to an old fable.

(15) p. 58. Burton in his "Anatomy of Melancholy," shows that this weakness of falling in love, on the strength of rumour, is by no means a weakness peculiar to King Edgar.

(16) p. 59. Alcuin was by birth an Englishman,

and became an English ecclesiastic of great reputation. He wrote against image-worship.

(17) p. 60. Edith's history is here pretty fairly given, save only that she was not of the lowly birth imputed to her in the poem.

(18) p. 68. The *portforie* was a prayer-book—before the art of printing.

(19) p. 75. Sterne's well-known aphorism of the *shorn lamb* was borrowed by him, as it is by me, from an old commonplace of the middle ages.

(20) p. 84. The sad history of "Edward the Martyr" connects unfavourably with the latter life of the heroine, Elfreda. See Hume.

(21) p. 91. The reference is to Virgil's tomb at Posilipo, on the Bay of Naples. The classical reader will observe an *accommodation* of that poet's celebrated verses, "Facilis decensus," etc.

(22) p. 94. The Æolian harp is said to have been invented by St. Dunstan; but in the legends of that age, it is affirmed that the saint hung up his harp on the wall, where it sung miraculously, of itself.

(23) p. 107. Macbeth is supposed to have lived two centuries later than our hero. But the histories of this rude age are full of similar tragedies.

(24) p. 108. The story is that Elfreda attired herself with great splendor. Unwilling to place the heroine in such a light as this cruel departure from her husband's wishes would reflect upon her,

I have attributed to her a better taste and a truer womanhood. It is certain that this literal compliance with Athwold's request, while less ungraceful, was infinitely more likely to awaken the admiration of such a man as King Edgar.

(25) p. 111. The Caliphs and their conquests were, at this period, the fertile source of romance, and the minstrels largely drew upon the Oriental poets, whose fictions were widely dispersed by the travellers, adventurers and soldiers of the times.

(26) p. 115. This anecdote of Mohammed is given by all his biographers, though with some variety of detail.

(27) p. 118. These references to the Arthurian history were all contained in the original draught of this poem as it was written in 1837. There was little knowledge of these names and allusions then; but the popular mind is now so familiar with them, through the genius of Mr. Tennyson, that no explanations of mine are required.

(28) p. 119. The barbarous treatment of Edwy and Elgiva—especially the outrages visited upon the lady—are attributed to Archbishop Odo, a predecessor of Dunstan's. The story is in Hume and all the histories of England.

(29) p. 137. There is no doubt expressed by the old writers as to Edgar's part in this terrible avenging. He slew Athwold, with his own hand; but, for the purposes of the poem, I have found it

preferable to let this fierce revenge be regarded as possibly the work of another—who is a purely fictitious hero.

(30) p. 141. The British Primacy was acknowledged as a free Patriarchate by Urban II. in the Council of Bari in the eleventh century.

(31) p. 142. Tyrtæus is here supposed to have been of Dorian family, and to have recognized a kindred origin with the Spartans, though his actual birth-place is unknown.

Once a poor waif at Athens, he was made a free citizen of Sparta as a reward for his martial lyrics. His songs had so wonderfully inspired its people, that one can hardly account for their success, except by the hereditary instincts of clan.

N. B.- On page 17, the following line, which should have followed line *third*, has been dropped:

"And oft their sluggard pace deride."